A Woman-Hater

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CHAPTER I

'HE "Golden Star," Homburg, was a humble hotel, not sed by gay gamblers, but by modest travellers.

At two o'clock, one fine day in June, there were two rangers in the *salle à manger*, seated at small tables a long ay apart, and wholly absorbed in their own business.

One was a lady, about twenty-four years old, who, in the resent repose of her features, looked comely, sedate, and omanly, but not the remarkable person she really was. Ier forehead high and white, but a little broader than ulptors affect. Her long hair, coiled tight, in a great many nooth snakes, upon her snowy nape, was almost flaxen, yet er eyebrows and long lashes not pale but a reddish brown. Ier grey eyes, large and profound; her mouth rather large, eautifully shaped, amiable, and expressive, but full of solution; her chin a little broad; her neck and hands lmirably white and polished. She was an Anglo-Dane—er father English.

If you ask me what she was doing, why—hunting; and ad been for some days, in all the inns of Homburg. She ad the visitors' book, and was going through the names of e whole year, and studying each to see whether it looked al or assumed. Interspersed were flippant comments and rses, adapted to draw a smile of amusement or contempt; it this hunter passed them all over as nullities: the steady se of her head, the glint of her deep eye, and the set of er fine lips, showed a mind not to be diverted from its ject.

The traveller at her back had a map of the district and ank telegrams, one of which he filled in every now and en, and scribbled a hasty letter to the same address. He

was a sharp-faced, middle-aged man of business; Joseph Ashmead, operatic and theatrical agent—at his wits' end. A female singer at the Homburg Opera had fallen really ill; he was commissioned to replace her, and had only thirty hours to do it in. So he was hunting a singer. What the lady was hunting can never be known, unless she should choose to reveal it.

Karl, the waiter, felt bound to rouse these abstracted guests, and stimulate their appetites. He affected, therefore, to look on them as people who had not yet breakfasted, and tripped up to Mr. Ashmead with a bill of fare, rather scanty.

The busiest Englishman can eat, and Ashmead had no objection to snatch a mouthful; he gave his order in German with an English accent. But the lady, when appealed to, said softly, in pure German, "I will wait for the *table-d'hôte.*"

"The *table-d'hôte!* It wants four hours to that."

The lady looked Karl full in the face and said, slowly and very distinctly, "Then, I—will—wait—four—hours."

These simple words, uttered firmly and in a contralto voice of singular volume and sweetness, sent Karl skipping; but their effect on Mr. Ashmead was more remarkable: he started up from his chair with an exclamation, and bent his eyes eagerly on the melodious speaker. He could only see her back hair and her figure; but, apparently, this quick-eared gentleman had also quick eyes, for he said aloud in English—"Her hair, too—it must be;" and he came hurriedly towards her. She caught a word or two, and turned, and saw him. "Ah!" said she, and rose; but the points of her fingers still rested on the book.

"It is!" cried Ashmead. "It is!"

"Yes, Mr. Ashmead," said the lady, colouring a little, but in pure English, and with a composure not easily disturbed; "it is Ina Klosking."

"What a pleasure!" cried Ashmead; "and what a surprise! Ah, madam, I never hoped to see you again. When I heard you had left the Munich Opera so sudden I said, 'There goes one more bright star, quenched for ever.' And you to desert us; you, the risingest singer in Germany!"

"Mr. Ashmead!"

"You can't deny it. You know you were."

The lady, thus made her own judge, seemed to reflect a moment, and said, "I was a well-grounded musician, thanks to my parents. I was a very hard-working singer; and I

had the advantage of being supported, in my early career, by a gentleman of judgment and spirit, who was a manager at first, and brought me forward, afterwards a popular agent, and talked managers into a good opinion of me."

"Ah, madam," said Ashmead tenderly, "it is a great pleasure to hear this from you, and spoken with that mellow voice, which would charm a rattlesnake; but what would my zeal and devotion have availed if you had not been a born singer?"

"Why—yes," said Ina thoughtfully; "I was a singer." But she seemed to say this, not as a thing to be proud of, but only because it happened to be true; and, indeed, it was a peculiarity of this woman, that she appeared nearly always to think—if but for half a moment—before she spoke, and to say things, whether about herself or others, only because they were the truth. The reader who shall condescend to bear this in mind will possess some little clue to the colour and effect of her words as spoken. Often, where they seem simple and commonplace on paper, they were weighty by their extraordinary air of truthfulness, as well as by the deep music of her mellow, bell-like voice.

"Oh, you do admit that," said Mr. Ashmead, with a chuckle; "then why jump off the ladder, so near the top? Oh, of course I know—the old story; but you might give twenty-two hours to love, and still spare a couple to music."

"That seems a reasonable division," said Ina naïvely. "But (apologetically) he was jealous."

"Jealous!—more shame for him. I'm sure no lady in public life was ever more discreet."

"No, no; he was only jealous of the public."

"And what had the poor public done?"

"Absorbed me, he said."

"Why, he could take you to the opera, and take you home from the opera, and, during the opera, he could make one of the public, and applaud you as loud as the best."

"Yes, but rehearsals!—and—embracing the Tenor."

"Well, but only on the stage?"

"Oh, Mr. Ashmead, where else does one embrace the Tenor?"

"And was that a grievance? Why, I'd embrace fifty Tenors—if I was paid proportionable."

"Yes, but he said I embraced one poor stick with a fervour—an *abandon*—Well, I daresay I did; for if they had put a gate-post in the middle of the stage, and it was in my

part to embrace the thing, I should have done it honestly, for love of my art, and not of a post. The next time I had to embrace the poor stick it was all I could do not to pinch him savagely."

"And turn him to a counter-tenor—make him squeak."

Ina Klosking smiled, for the first time. Ashmead, too, chuckled at his own wit, but turned suddenly grave the next moment, and moralised. He pronounced it desirable, for the interests of mankind, that a great and rising singer should not love out of the business; outsiders were wrong-headed and absurd, and did not understand the true artist. However, having discoursed for some time in this strain, he began to fear it might be unpalatable to her; so he stopped abruptly and said, "But there—what is done is done. We must make the best of it, and you mustn't think I meant to run *him* down. He loves you, in his way. He must be a noble fellow, or he never could have won such a heart as yours. He won't be jealous of an old fellow like me, though I love you too, in my humdrum way, and always did. You must do me the honour to present me to him at once."

Ina stared at him, but said nothing.

"Oh," continued Ashmead, "I shall be busy till evening; but I will ask him and you to dine with me at the Kursaal, and then adjourn to the Royal Box. You are a Queen of Song, and that is where you and he shall sit, and nowhere else."

Ina Klosking was changing colour all this time, and cast a grateful but troubled look on him. "My kind, old faithful friend!" said she; then shook her head. "No, we are not to dine with you; nor sit together at the opera, in Homburg."

Ashmead looked a little chagrined. "So be it," he said drily. "But, at least, introduce me to him. I'll try and overcome his prejudices."

"It is not even in my power to do that."

"Oh, I see. I'm not good enough for him," said Ashmead bitterly.

"You do yourself injustice, and him too," said Ina courteously.

"Well, then?"

"My friend," said she deprecatingly, "he is not here."

"Not here? That is odd. Well, then, you will be dull till he comes back. Come without him; at all events, to the opera."

She turned her tortured eyes away. "I have not the heart."

This made Ashmead look at her more attentively. "Why, what is the matter?" said he. "You are in trouble. I declare you are trembling, and your eyes are filling. My poor lady—in Heaven's name, what is the matter?"

"Hush!" said Ina; "not so loud." Then she looked him in the face a little while, blushed, hesitated, faltered, and at last laid one white hand upon her bosom, that was beginning to heave, and said, with patient dignity, "My old friend—I—am—deserted."

Ashmead looked at her with amazement and incredulity. "Deserted!" said he faintly; "you—deserted!!!"

"Yes," said she, "deserted;—but perhaps not for ever." Her noble eyes filled to the brim, and two tears stood ready to run over.

"Why, the man must be an idiot!" shouted Ashmead.

"Hush! not so loud. That waiter is listening: let me come to your table."

She came and sat down at his table, and he sat opposite her. They looked at each other. He waited for her to speak. With all her fortitude, her voice faltered under the eye of sympathy.

"You are my old friend," she said; "I will try and tell you all." But she could not all in a moment, and the two tears trickled over and ran down her cheeks. Ashmead saw them and burst out, "The villain!—the villain!"

"No, no," said she, "do not call him that. I could not bear it. Believe me, he is no villain." Then she dried her eyes and said resolutely, "If I am to tell you, you must not apply harsh words to him. They would close my mouth at once; and close my heart."

"I won't say a word," said Ashmead submissively; "so tell me all."

Ina reflected a moment, and then told her tale. Dealing now with longer sentences, she betrayed her foreign half.

"Being alone so long," said she, "has made me reflect more than in all my life before, and I now understand many things that, at the time, I could not. He, to whom I have given my love, and resigned the art in which I was advancing—with your assistance—is, by nature, impetuous and inconstant. He was born so; and I the opposite. His love for me was too

violent to last for ever in any man, and it soon cooled in him, because he is inconstant by nature. He was jealous of the public: he must have all my heart, and all my time, and so he wore his own passion out. Then his great restlessness, having now no chain, became too strong for our happiness. He pined for change, as some wanderers pine for a fixed home. Is it not strange? I, a child of the theatre, am, at heart, domestic. He, a gentleman and a scholar, born, bred, and fitted to adorn the best society, is, by nature, a Bohemian."

"One word. is there another woman?"

"No, not that I know of; Heaven forbid!" said Ina. "But there is something very dreadful: there is gambling. He has a passion for it, and I fear I wearied him by my remonstrances. He dragged me about from one gambling-place to another, and I saw that if I resisted he would go without me. He lost a fortune whilst we were together, and I do really believe he is ruined, poor dear."

Ashmead suppressed all signs of ill-temper, and asked grimly, "Did he quarrel with you?"

"Oh, no, he never said an unkind word to me; and I was not always so forbearing, for I passed months of torment. I saw that affection, which was my all, gliding gradually away from me, and the tortured will cry out. I am not an ungoverned woman, but sometimes the agony was intolerable, and I complained. Well, that agony, I long for it back; for now I am desolate."

"Poor soul!—How could a man have the heart to leave you? how could he have the face?"

"Oh, he did not do it shamelessly. He left me for a week to visit friends in England. But he wrote to me from London. He had left me at Berlin. He said that he did not like to tell me, before parting, but I must not expect to see him for six weeks; and he desired me to go to my mother, in Denmark. He would send his next letter to me there. Ah! he knew I should need my mother when his second letter came. He had planned it all, that the blow might not kill me. He wrote to tell me he was a ruined man, and he was too proud to let me support him; he begged my pardon for his love, for his desertion, for ever having crossed my brilliant path like a dark cloud. He praised me, he thanked me, he blessed me; but he left me. It was a beautiful letter; but it was the death-warrant of my heart. I was abandoned."

Ashmead started up and walked very briskly, with a great

appearance of business requiring vast despatch, to the other end of the *salle;* and there, being out of Ina's hearing, he spoke his mind to a candlestick with three branches. "D—n him! Heartless, sentimental scoundrel; d—n him! D—n him!"

Having relieved his mind with this pious ejaculation, he returned to Ina at a reasonable pace and much relieved; and was now enabled to say cheerfully, "Let us take a business view of it. He is gone, gone of his own accord. Give him your blessing—I have *given* him mine—and forget him."

"Forget him! Never while I live. Is that your advice? Oh, Mr. Ashmead! And the moment I saw your friendly face, I said to myself, 'I am no longer alone; here is one that will help me.'"

"And so I will, you may be sure of that," said Ashmead eagerly. "What is the business?"

"The business is to find him. That is the first thing.'

"But he is in England."

"Oh, no; that was eight months ago. He could not stay eight months in any country; besides, there are no gambling-houses there."

"And have you been eight months searching Europe for this madman?"

"No; at first pride and anger were strong, and I said, 'Here I stay till he comes back to me and to his senses.'"

"Brava!"

"Yes; but month after month went by, carrying away my pride and my anger, and leaving my affection undiminished. At last I could bear it no longer; so, as he would not come to his senses——"

"You took leave of yours, and came out on a wild-goose chase," said Ashmead, but too regretfully to affront her.

"It *was,*" said Ina; "I feel it. But it is not one *now,* because I have *you* to assist me with your experience and ability. You will find him for me, somehow or other. I know you will."

Let a woman have ever so little guile, she must have tact, if she is a true woman. Now tact, if its etymology is to be trusted, implies a fine sense and power of touch; so, in virtue of her sex, she pats a horse before she rides him, and a man before she drives him. There, ladies, there is an indictment in two counts; traverse either of them if you can.

Joseph Ashmead, thus delicately but effectually manipulated, swelled with gratified vanity and said, "You are quite

right; you can't do this sort of thing yourself—you want an agent."

"Of course I do."

"Well, you have got one. Now let me see—fifty to one he is not at Homburg at all. If he is he most likely stays at Frankfort. He is a swell, is he not?"

"Swell," said the Anglo-Dane, puzzled. "Not that I am aware of." She was strictly on her guard against vituperation of her beloved scamp.

"Pooh, pooh!" said Ashmead; "of course he is, and not the sort to lodge in Homburg."

"Then behold my incompetence!" said Ina.

"But *the* place to look for him is the gambling saloon. Been there?"

"Oh no."

"Then you must."

"What!—Me!—Alone?"

"No; with your agent."

"Oh, my friend; I said you would find him."

"What a woman! She will have it he is in Homburg. And suppose we do find him and you should not be welcome?"

"I shall not be unwelcome. *I shall be a change.*"

"Shall I tell you how to draw him to Homburg wherever he is?" said Ashmead, very demurely.

"Yes, tell me that."

"And do *me* a good turn into the bargain."

"Is it possible? can I be so fortunate?"

"Yes; and, *as you say,* it *is* a slice of luck to be able to kill two birds with one stone. Why, consider—the way to recover a man is not to run after him, but to make him run to you. It is like catching moths; you don't run out into the garden after them, you light the candle and open the window, and *they* do the rest—as he will."

"Yes, yes; but what am I to do for *you?*" asked Ina, getting a little uneasy and suspicious.

"What, didn't I tell you?" said Ashmead, with cool effrontery. "Why, only to sing for me in this little opera, that is all." And he put his hands in his pockets, and awaited thunder-claps.

"Oh, that is all, is it?" said Ina, panting a little, and turning two great reproachful eyes on him.

"That is all," said he stoutly. "Why, what attracted him at first? Wasn't it your singing, the admiration of the

public, the bouquets and bravas? What caught the moth once will catch it again—'moping' won't. And surely you will not refuse to draw him, merely because you can pull me out of a fix into the bargain. Look here: I have undertaken to find a singer by to-morrow night; and what chance is there of my getting even a third-rate one? Why, the very hour I have spent so agreeably talking to you has diminished my chance."

"Oh," said Ina, "this is *driving* me into your net."

"I own it," said Joseph cheerfully; "I'm quite unscrupulous, because I know you will thank me afterwards."

"The very idea of going back to the stage makes me tremble," said Ina.

"Of course it does; and those who tremble succeed. In a long experience I never knew an instance to the contrary. It is the conceited fools who feel safe that are in danger."

"What is the part?"

"One you know—Siebel in 'Faust,' with two new songs."

"Excuse me, I do not know it."

"Why, everybody knows it."

"You mean everybody has heard it sung. I know neither the music nor the words, and I cannot sing incorrectly even for you."

"Oh, you can master the airs in a day, and the cackle in half-an-hour."

"I am not so expeditious. If you are serious, get me the book—oh, he calls the poet's words the cackle!—and the music of the part directly, and borrow me the score."

"Borrow you the score! Ah! that shows the school you were bred in. I gaze at you with admiration."

"Then please don't, for we have not a moment to waste. You have terrified me out of my senses. Fly!"

"Yes; but before I fly, there is something to be settled—salary!"

"As much as they will give."

"Of course; but give me a hint."

"No, no; you will get me some money, for I am poor! I gave all my savings to my dear mother, and settled her on a farm in dear old Denmark. But I really sing for *you* more than for Homburg; so make no difficulties. Above all, do not discuss salary with me. Settle it and draw it for me, and let me hear no more about that. I am on thorns."

He soon found the director, and told him, excitedly, there was a way out of his present difficulty. Ina Klosking was in

the town. He had implored her to return to the opera. She had refused at first; but he had used all his influence with her, and at last had obtained a half promise on conditions—a two months' engagement, certain parts, which he specified out of his own head; salary, a hundred thalers per night, and a half clear benefit on her last appearance.

The director demurred to the salary.

Ashmead said he was mad; she was the German Alboni, her low notes like a trumpet, and the compass of a mezzo-soprano besides.

The director yielded, and drew up the engagement in duplicate. Ashmead then borrowed the music, and came back to the inn triumphant. He waved the agreement over his head, then submitted it to her. She glanced at it, made a wry face, and said, "Two months! I never dreamed of such a thing."

"Not worth your while to do it for less," said Ashmead. "Come," said he authoritatively, "you have got a good bargain every way; so sign."

She lifted her head high and looked at him like a lioness, at being ordered.

Ashmead replied by putting the paper before her and giving her the pen.

She cast one more reproachful glance, then signed like a lamb.

"Now," said she, turning fretful, "I want a piano."

"You shall have one," said he coaxingly. He went to the landlord and inquired if there was a piano in the house.

"Yes, there is one," said he.

"And it is mine," said a sharp female voice.

"May I beg the use of it?"

"No," said the lady, a tall bony spinster. "I cannot have it strummed on and put out of tune by everybody."

"But this is not everybody. The lady I want it for is a professional musician. Top of the tree."

"The hardest strummers going."

"But, mademoiselle, this lady is going to sing at the opera. She *must* study. She *must* have a piano."

"But (grimly) she need not have mine."

"Then she must leave the hotel."

"Oh (haughtily), *that* is as she pleases."

Ashmead went to Ina Klosking in a rage and told her all this, and said he would take her to another hotel kept by a

Frenchman; these Germans were bears. But Ina Klosking just shrugged her shoulders and said, "Take me to her."

He did so; and she said in German, "Madam, I can quite understand your reluctance to have your piano strummed. But, as your hotel is quiet and respectable, and I am unwilling to leave it, will you permit me to play to you, and then you shall decide whether I am worthy to stay or not?"

The spinster drank those mellow accents; coloured a little, looked keenly at the speaker, and, after a moment's reflection, said, half sullenly, "No, madam, you are polite. I must risk my poor piano. Be pleased to come with me."

She then conducted them to a large unoccupied room on the first floor and unlocked the piano, a very fine one, and in perfect tune.

Ina sat down and performed a composition then in vogue.

"You play correctly, madam," said the spinster; "but your music—what stuff! Such things are null. They vex the ear a little, but they never reach the mind."

Ashmead was wroth and could hardly contain himself; but the Klosking was amused and rather pleased. "Mademoiselle has positive tastes in music," said she; "all the better."

"Yes," said the spinster, "most music is mere noise. I hate and despise forty-nine compositions out of fifty; but the fiftieth I adore. Give me something simple, with a little soul in it—if you can."

Ina Klosking looked at her, and observed her age and her dress, the latter old-fashioned. She said quietly, "Will mademoiselle do me the honour to stand before me? I will sing her a trifle my mother taught me."

The spinster complied, and stood erect and stiff, with her arms folded. Ina fixed her deep eyes on her, playing a liquid prelude all the time, then swelled her chest and sang the old Venetian canzonet, "Il pescatore dell' onda." It is a small thing, but there is no limit to the genius of song. The Klosking sang this trifle with a voice so grand, sonorous, and sweet, and above all, with such feeling, taste, and purity, that somehow she transported her hearers to Venetian waters, moonlit, and thrilled them to the heart; while the great glass chandelier kept ringing very audibly, so true, massive, and vibrating were her tones in that large empty room.

At the first verse that cross-grained spinster, with real likes and dislikes, put a bony hand quietly before her eyes. At the last, she made three strides, as a soldier marches, and fell

all of a piece, like a wooden *mannequin*, on the singer's neck. "Take my piano," she sobbed, "for you have taken the heart out of my body."

Ina returned her embrace and did not conceal her pleasure. "I am very proud of such a conquest," said she.

From that hour Ina was the landlady's pet. The room and piano were made over to her, and being in a great fright at what she had undertaken, she studied and practised her part night and day. She made Ashmead call a rehearsal next day, and she came home from it wretched and almost hysterical.

She summoned her slave Ashmead; he stood before her with an air of hypocritical submission.

"The Flute was not at rehearsal, sir," said she severely; "nor the Oboe, nor the Violoncello."

"Just like 'em," said Ashmead tranquilly.

"The Tenor is a quavering stick. He is one of those who think that an unmanly trembling of the voice represents every manly passion."

"Their name is legion."

"The Soprano is insipid. And they are all imperfect—contentedly imperfect. How can people sing incorrectly? It is like lying."

"That is what makes it so common; he! he!"

"I do not desire wit, but consolation. I believe you are Mephistopheles himself in disguise; for ever since I signed that diabolical compact you made me, I have been in a state of terror, agitation, misgiving, and misery—and I thank and bless you for it; for those thorns and nettles they lacerate me, and make me live. They break the dull lethargic agony of utter desolation."

Then, as her nerves were female nerves, and her fortitude female fortitude, she gave way, for once, and began to cry patiently.

Ashmead the practical went softly away, and left her, as we must leave her for a time, to battle her business with one hand and her sorrow with the other.

CHAPTER II

In the Hotel de Russie, at Frankfort, there was a grand apartment, lofty, spacious, and richly furnished, with a broad balcony overlooking the Platz, and roofed, so to speak, with coloured sun-blinds, which softened the glare of the Rhineland sun to a rosy and mellow delight.

In the verandah a tall English gentleman was leaning over the balcony, smoking a cigar, and being courted by a fair young lady. Her light-grey eyes dwelt on him in a way to magnetise a man; and she purred pretty nothings at his ear, in a soft tone she reserved for males—her voice was clear, loud, and rather high-pitched whenever she spoke to a person of her own sex: a comely English blonde, with pale eyelashes; a keen, sensible girl, and not a downright wicked one; only born artful. This was Fanny Dover; and the tall gentleman—whose relation she was, and whose wife she resolved to be in one year, three years, or ten, according to his power of resistance—was Harrington Vizard, a Bradfordshire squire, with twelve thousand acres, and a library.

As for Fanny, she had only £2000 in all the world; so compensating Nature endowed her with a fair complexion, grey, mesmeric eyes, art, and resolution—qualities that often enable a poor girl to conquer landed estates, with their male encumbrances.

Beautiful and delicate—on the surface—as was Miss Dover's courtship of her first cousin once removed, it did not strike fire; it neither pleased nor annoyed him; it fell as dead as a lantern firing on an iceberg. Not that he disliked her by any means. But he was thirty-two, and had seen the world, and had been unlucky with women. So he was now a *divorcé*, and a declared woman-hater; railed on them, and kept them at arm's length, Fanny Dover included. It was really comical to see with what perfect coolness and cynical apathy he parried the stealthy advances of this cat-like girl, a mistress in the art of pleasing—when she chose.

Inside the room, on a couch of crimson velvet, sat a young lady of rare and dazzling beauty. Her face was a long but perfect oval, pure forehead, straight nose with exquisite nostrils, coral lips, and ivory teeth. But what first struck the beholder were her glorious dark eyes, and magnificent

eyebrows as black as jet. Her hair was really like a raven's dark purple wing.

These beauties, in a stern character, might have inspired awe, the more so as her form and limbs were grand and statuesque for her age; but all was softened down to sweet womanhood by long silken lashes, often lowered, and a gracious face that blushed at a word, blushed little, blushed much, blushed pinky, blushed pink, blushed roseate, blushed rosy; and, I am sorry to say, blushed crimson, and even scarlet, in the course of those events I am about to record as unblushing as turnip and cool as cucumber. This scale of blushes arose not out of modesty alone, but out of the wide range of her sensibility. On hearing of a noble deed, she blushed warm approbation; at a worthy sentiment, she blushed heartfelt sympathy. If you said a thing at the fire that might hurt some person at the farthest window, she would blush for fear it should be overheard and cause pain.

In short, it was her peculiarity to blush readily for matters quite outside herself, and to show the male observer (if any) the amazing sensibility, apart from egotism, that sometimes adorns a young, high-minded woman, not yet hardened by the world.

This young lady was Zoe Vizard, daughter of Harrington's father, by a Greek mother, who died when she was twelve years of age. Her mixed origin showed itself curiously: in her figure and face she was all Greek, even to her hand, which was moulded divinely, but as long and large as befitted her long, grand, antique arm; but her mind was northern—not a grain of Greek subtlety in it. Indeed she would have made a poor hand at dark deceit, with a transparent face, and eloquent blood, that kept coursing from her heart to her cheeks and back again, and painting her thoughts upon her countenance.

Having installed herself, with feminine instinct, in a crimson couch that framed her to perfection, Zoe Vizard was at work—embroidering. She had some flowers, and their leaves, lying near her on a little table, and, with coloured silks, *chenille*, &c., she imitated each flower and its leaf very adroitly, without a pattern. This was clever, and, indeed, rather a rare talent; but she lowered her head over this work with a demure, beaming complacency embroidery alone never yet excited without external assistance. Accordingly, on a large stool, or little ottoman, at her feet, but at a respectful distance, sat a young man, almost her match in

beauty, though in quite another style. In height about five feet ten, broad-shouldered, clean built, a model of strength, agility, and grace: his face fair, fresh, and healthy-looking; his large eyes hazel; the crisp curling hair on his shapely head a wonderful brown in the mass, but with one thin streak of gold above the forehead, and all the loose hairs glittering golden; a short-clipped moustache saved him from looking too feminine, yet did not hide his expressive mouth; he had white hands, as soft and supple as a woman's, a mellow voice, and a winning tongue. This dangerous young gentleman was gazing softly on Zoe Vizard and purring in her ear; and she was conscious of his gaze, without looking at him, and was sipping the honey, and showed it, by seeming more absorbed in her work than girls ever really are.

Matters, however, had not gone openly very far. She was still on her defence: so, after imbibing his flatteries demurely a long time, she discovered, all in one moment, that they were objectionable. "Dear me, Mr. Severne," said she, "you do nothing but pay compliments."

"How can I help it, sitting here?" inquired he.

"There—there," said she; then, quietly, "Does it never occur to you that only foolish people are pleased with flatteries?"

"I have heard that; but I don't believe it. I know it makes me awfully happy whenever you say a kind word of me."

"That is far from proving your wisdom," said Zoe; "and, instead of dwelling on my perfections, which do not exist, I wish you would *tell* me things."

"What things?"

"How can I tell, till I hear them? Well, then, things about yourself."

"That is a poor subject."

"Let me be the judge."

"Oh, there are lots of fellows who are always talking about themselves: let me be an exception."

This answer puzzled Zoe, and she was silent, and put on a cold look. She was not accustomed to be refused anything reasonable.

Severne examined her closely, and saw he was expected to obey her: he then resolved to prepare, in a day or two, an autobiography full of details, that should satisfy Zoe's curiosity, and win her admiration and her love. But he could not do it all in a moment, because his memory of real

life obstructed his fancy. Meantime he operated a diversion. He said, "Set a poor fellow an example. Tell me something about *yourself*—since I have the bad taste, and the presumption, to be interested in you, and can't help it. Did you spring from the foam of the Archipelago? or are you descended from Bacchus and Ariadne?"

"If you want sensible answers, ask sensible questions," said Zoe, trying to frown him down with her black brows; but her sweet cheek would tint itself, and her sweet mouth smile and expose much intercoral ivory.

"Well, then," said he, "I will ask you a prosaic question, and I only hope you won't think it impertinent. How—ever—did such a strangely-assorted party as yours come to travel together; and, if Vizard has turned woman-hater, as he pretends, how comes he to be at the head of a female party, who are not *all* of them——" He hesitated.

"Go on, Mr. Severne; not all of them—what?" said Zoe, prepared to stand up for her sex.

"Not perfect?"

"That is a very cautious statement, and—there—you are as slippery as an eel, there is no getting hold of you. Well, never mind, I will set you an example of communicativeness, and reveal this mystery hidden as yet from mankind."

"Speak, dread queen; thy servant heareth."

"Ha! ha! ha! Mr. Severne, you amuse *me*."

"You only interest *me*," was the soft reply.

Zoe blushed pink, but turned it off. "Then why do you not attend to my interesting narrative, instead of—— Well, then, it began with my asking the dear fellow to take me a tour, especially to Rome."

"You wanted to see the statues of your ancestors, and shame them."

"Much obliged; I was not quite such a goose. I wanted to see the Tiber, and the Colosseum, and Trajan's pillar, and the Tarpeian rock, and the one everlasting city, that binds ancient and modern history together."

She flashed her great eyes on him, and he was dumb. She had risen above the region of his ideas. Having silenced her commentator, she returned to her story. "Well, dear Harrington said 'yes' directly. So then I told Fanny; and she said, 'Oh, do take me with you!' Now, of course I was only too glad to have Fanny; she is my relation, and my friend."

"Happy girl!"

"Be quiet, please. So I asked Harrington to let me have Fanny with us, and you should have seen his face. What! he travel with a couple of us! He—— I don't see why I should tell you what the monster said."

"Oh yes, please do."

"You won't go telling anybody else then?"

"Not a living soul, upon my honour."

"Well, then, he said"—she began to blush like a rose—"that he looked on me as a mere female in embryo; I had not yet developed the vices of my sex. But Fanny Dover was a ripe flirt, and she would set me flirting, and how could he manage the pair? In short, sir, he refused to take us, and gave his reasons, such as they were, poor dear! Then I had to tell Fanny. Then she began to cry, and told me to go without her. But I would not do that, when I had once asked her. Then she clung round my neck and kissed me, and begged me to be cross and sullen, and tire out dear Harrington."

"That is like her."

"How do you know?" said Zoe sharply.

"Oh, I have studied her character."

"When, pray?" said Zoe ironically, yet blushing a little, because her secret meaning was, "You are always at my apron-strings, and have no time to fathom Fanny."

"When I have nothing better to do; when you are out of the room."

"Well, I shall be out of the room very soon, if you say another word."

"And serve me right, too. I am a fool to talk, when you allow me to listen."

"He is incorrigible," said Zoe pathetically. "Well, then, I refused to pout at Harrington. It is not as if he had no reason to distrust women, poor dear darling! I invited Fanny to stay a month with us; and, when once she was in the house, she soon got over me, and persuaded me to play sad, and showed me how to do it. So we wore long faces, and sweet resignation, and were never cross, but kept turning tearful eyes upon our victim."

"Ha! ha! How absurd of Vizard to tell you that two women would be too much for one man."

"No, it was the truth; and girls are artful creatures, especially when they put their heads together. But hear the end of all our cunning. One day, after dinner, Harrington asked us to sit opposite him; so we did, and felt guilty. He

surveyed us in silence a little while, and then he said: 'My young friends, you have played your little game pretty well, especially you, Zoe, that are a novice in the fine arts compared with Miss Dover.' Histrionic talent ought to be rewarded; he would relent, and take us abroad, on one condition: there must be a chaperon. 'All the better,' said we hypocrites eagerly; 'and who?'"

"'Oh, a person equal to the occasion—an old maid as bitter against men as ever grapes were sour. She would follow us upstairs, downstairs, and into my lady's chamber. She would have an eye at the keyhole by day, and an ear by night, when we went up to bed and talked over the events of our frivolous day.' In short, he enumerated our duenna's perfections till our blood ran cold; and it was ever so long before he would tell us who it was—Aunt Maitland. We screamed with surprise. They are like cat and dog, and never agree except to differ. We asked an explanation of this strange choice. He obliged us. 'It was not for his gratification he took the old cat, it was for us. She would relieve him of a vast responsibility. The vices of her character would prove too strong for the little faults of ours, which were only volatility, frivolity, flirtation'—I will *not* tell you what he said."

"I seem to hear Harrington talking," said Severne. "What on earth makes him so hard upon women? Would you mind telling me that?"

"Never ask me that question again," said Zoe, with sudden gravity.

"Well, I won't; I'll get it out of him."

"If you say a word to him about it, I shall be shocked and offended."

She was pale and red by turns; but Severne bowed his head with a respectful submission that disarmed her directly. She turned her head away, and Severne, watching her, saw her eyes fill.

"How is it," said she thoughtfully, and looking away from him, "that men leave out their sisters, when they sum up womankind? Are not we women too? My poor brother quite forgets he has one woman who will never, never desert nor deceive him; dear, darling fellow!" and with these three last words she rose, and kissed the tips of her fingers, and waved the kiss to Vizard with that free magnitude of gesture which belonged to antiquity; it struck the Anglo-Saxon flirt at her feet with amazement. Not having good enough under

his skin to sympathise with that pious impulse, he first stagnated a little while, and then, not to be silent altogether, made his little, stale, commonplace comment on what she had told him. "Why, it is like a novel."

"A very unromantic one," replied Zoe.

"I don't know that. I have read very interesting novels with fewer new characters than this; there's a dark beauty and a fair, and a duenna with an eagle eye and an aquiline nose."

"Hush!" said Zoe; "that is her room;" and pointed to a chamber-door that opened into the apartment.

Oh, marvellous female instinct! The duenna in charge was, at that moment, behind that very door, and her eye and her ear at the keyhole, turn about.

Severne continued his remarks, but in a lower voice.

"Then there's a woman-hater and a man-hater: good for dialogue."

Now this banter did not please Zoe; so she fixed her eyes upon Severne and said, "You forget the principal figure—a mysterious young gentleman who looks nineteen and is twenty-nine, and was lost sight of in England nine years ago. He has been travelling ever since, and wherever he went he flirted; we gather so much, from his accomplishment in the art: fluent, not to say voluble at times, but no egotist; for he never tells you anything about himself nor even about his family; still less about the numerous *affaires de cœur* in which he has been engaged. Perhaps he is reserving it all for the third volume."

The attack was strong and sudden, but it failed. Severne, within the limits of his experience, was a consummate artist, and this situation was not new to him. He cast one gently reproachful glance on her, then lowered his eyes to the carpet, and kept them there. "Do you think," said he, in a low, dejected voice, "it can be any pleasure to a man to relate the follies of an idle, aimless life—and to you, who have given me higher aspirations, and made me awfully sorry I cannot live my whole life over again? I can't bear to think of the years I have wasted," said he; "and how can I talk to you, whom I reverence, of the past follies I despise? No, pray don't ask me to risk your esteem. It is so dear to me."

Then this artist put in practice a little manœuvre he had learned, of compressing his muscles, and forcing a little unwilling water into his eyes. So, at the end of his pretty

little speech, he raised two gentle imploring eyes, with half a tear in each of them. To be sure, nature assisted his art for once; he did bitterly regret, but out of pure egotism, the years he had wasted, and wished, with all his heart, he had never known any woman but Zoe Vizard.

The combination of art and sincerity were too much for the guileless and inexperienced Zoe. She was grieved at the pain she had given and rose to retire, for she felt they were both on dangerous ground; but, as she turned away, she made a little deprecating gesture, and said softly, "Forgive me."

That soft tone gave Severne courage, and that gesture gave him an opportunity; he seized her hand, murmured, "Angel of goodness!" and bestowed a long, loving kiss on her hand that made it quiver under his lips.

"Oh!" cried Miss Maitland, bursting into the room at the nick of time, yet feigning amazement. Fanny heard the ejaculation, and whipped away from Harrington into the window. Zoe, with no motive but her own coyness, had already snatched her hand away from Severne.

But both young ladies were one moment too late. The eagle eye of a terrible old maid had embraced the entire situation, and they saw she had.

Harrington Vizard, Esq., smoked on, with his back to the group. But the rest were a picture: the mutinous face and keen eyes of Fanny Dover, bristling with defence, at the window; Zoe blushing crimson, and newly started away from her too enterprising wooer; and the tall, thin, grim old maid, standing stiff, as sentinel, at the bedroom door, and gimleting both her charges alternately with steel-grey orbs—she seemed like an owl, all eyes and beak.

When the chaperon had fixed the situation thoroughly, she stalked erect into the room, and said, very expressively, "I am afraid I disturb you."

Zoe, from crimson, blushed scarlet, and hung her head; but Fanny was ready.

"La! aunt," said she ironically, and with pertness infinite, "you know you are always welcome. Wherever have you been all this time? We were afraid we had lost you."

Aunt fired her pistol in reply: "I was not far off—most fortunately."

Zoe, finding that, even under crushing circumstances, Fanny

had fight in her, glided instantly to her side, and Aunt Maitland opened battle all round.

"May I ask, sir," said she to Severne, with a horrible smile, "what you were doing when I came in?"

Zoe clutched Fanny, and both awaited Mr. Severne's reply for one moment with keen anxiety.

"My dear Miss Maitland," said that able young man, very respectfully, yet with a sort of cheerful readiness, as if he was delighted at her deigning to question him, "to tell you the truth, I was admiring Miss Vizard's diamond ring."

Fanny tittered; Zoe blushed again at such a fib and such *aplomb.*

"Oh, indeed!" said Miss Maitland; "you were admiring it very close, sir."

"It is like herself—it will bear inspection."

This was wormwood to Miss Maitland. "Even in our ashes live their wonted fires;" and, though she was sixty, she disliked to hear a young woman praised. She bridled, then returned to the attack.

"Next time you wish to inspect it, you had better ask her *to take it off* and show you."

"May I, Miss Maitland?" inquired the ingenuous youth. "She would not think that a liberty?"

His mild effrontery staggered her for a moment, and she glared at him, speechless; but soon recovered, and said bitterly, "Evidently *not.*" With this she turned her back on him rather ungraciously, and opened fire on her own sex.

"Zoe!" (sharply).

"Yes, aunt" (faintly).

"Tell your brother—if he can leave off smoking—I wish to speak to him."

Zoe hung her head, and was in no hurry to bring about the proposed conference.

While she deliberated, says Fanny, with vast alacrity, "I'll tell him, aunt."

"Oh, Fanny!" murmured Zoe, in a reproachful whisper.

"All right!" whispered Fanny in reply, and whipped out on to the balcony. "Here's Aunt Maitland wants to know if you ever leave off smoking;" and she threw a most aggressive manner into the query.

The big man replied composedly, "Tell her I do at meals and prayers; but I always *sleep* with a pipe in my mouth—heavily insured!"

"Well, then, you mustn't; for she has something very particular to say to you, when you've done smoking."

"Something particular! That means something disagreeable. Tell her I shall be smoking all day to-day."

Fanny danced into the room and said, "He says he shall be smoking all day *under the circumstances.*"

Miss Maitland gave this faithful messenger the look of a basilisk, and flounced to her own room. The young ladies instantly stepped out on the balcony, and got one on each side of Harrington, with the feminine instinct of propitiation; for they felt sure the enemy would tell, soon or late.

"What does the old cat want to talk to me about?" said Harrington lazily, to Fanny.

It was Zoe who replied—

"Can't you guess, dear?" said she tenderly—"our misconduct." Then she put her head on his shoulder, as much as to say, "But we have a more lenient judge here."

"As if I could not see *that* without her assistance," said Harrington Vizard. (Puff!) At which comfortable reply Zoe looked very rueful, and Fanny burst out laughing.

Soon after this, Fanny gave Zoe a look, and they retired to their rooms; and Zoe said she would never come out again, and Fanny must stay with her. Fanny felt sure *ennui* would thaw that resolve in a few hours; so she submitted, but declared it was absurd, and the very way to give a perfect trifle importance.

"Kiss your hand!" said she disdainfully—"that is nothing. If I were the man, I'd have kissed both your cheeks long before this."

"And I should have boxed your ears and made you cry," said Zoe, with calm superiority.

So she had her way, and the deserted Severne felt dull, but was too good a general to show it; he bestowed his welcome company on Mr. Vizard, walked with him, talked with him, and made himself so agreeable, that Vizard, who admired him greatly, said to him, "What a good fellow you are, to bestow your sunshine on me! I began to be afraid those girls had got you, and tied you to their apron-strings altogether."

"Oh, no," said Severne; "they are charming. But, after all, one can't do without a male friend; there are so few things that interest ladies. Unless you can talk red-hot religion, you are bound to flirt with them a little. To be sure, they look shy—if you do; but, if you don't——"

"They *are* bored; whereas they only *looked* shy. I know 'em. Call another subject, please."

"Well, I will; but perhaps it may not be so agreeable a one."

"That is very unlikely," said the woman-hater drily.

"Well, it is Tin. I'm rather short. You see, when I fell in with you at Monaco, I had no idea of coming this way; but meeting with an old college friend—what a tie college is, isn't it? there is nothing like it; when you have been at college with a man, you seem never to wear him out, as you do the acquaintances you make afterwards."

"That is very true," said Vizard warmly.

"Isn't it? Now, for instance, if I had only known you of late years, I should feel awfully shy of borrowing a few hundreds of you—for a month or two."

"I don't know why you should, old fellow."

"I should, though. But having been at college together makes all the difference. I don't mind telling you that I have never been at Homburg without taking a turn at the table, and I am grizzling awfully now at not having sent to my man of business for funds."

"How much do you want? that is the only question."

"Glad to hear it," thought Severne. "Well, let me see, you can't back your luck with less than five hundred."

"Well, but we have been out two months; I am afraid I haven't so much left. Just let me see." He took out his pocket-book, and examined his letter of credit. "Do you want it to-day?"

"Why, yes; I do."

"Well, then, I am afraid you can only have three hundred. But I will telegraph Herries, and funds will be here to-morrow afternoon."

"All right," said Severne.

Vizard took him to the bank, and exhausted his letter of credit; then to the telegraph office, and telegraphed Herries to enlarge his credit at once. He handed Severne the three hundred pounds. The young man's eye flashed, and it cost him an effort not to snatch them and wave them over his head with joy; but he controlled himself, and took them like twopence halfpenny.

"Thank you, old fellow," said he. Then, still more carelessly, "Like my I O U?"

"As you please," said Vizard, with similar indifference; only real.

After he had got the money, Severne's conversational powers relaxed—short answers—long reveries.

Vizard observed, stopped short, and eyed him. "I remember something at Oxford, and I am afraid you are a gambler: if you are, you won't be good for much till you have lost that three hundred. It will be a dull evening for me without you: I know what I'll do—I'll take my hen-party to the opera at Homburg. There are stalls to be got here. I'll get one for you, on the chance of your dropping in."

The stalls were purchased, and the friends returned at once to the hotel, to give the ladies timely intimation. They found Fanny and Zoe seated, rather disconsolate, in the apartment Zoe had formally renounced: at sight of the stall tickets, the pair uttered joyful cries, looked at each other and vanished.

"You won't see *them* any more till dinner-time," said Vizard. "They will be discussing dress, selecting dress, trying dresses, and changing dresses, for the next three hours." He turned round whilst speaking, and there was Severne slipping away to his own bedroom.

Thus deserted on all sides, he stepped into the balcony and lighted a cigar. Whilst he was smoking it he observed an English gentleman, with a stalwart figure and a beautiful brown beard, standing on the steps of the hotel. "Hollo!" said he, and hailed him. "Hy! Uxmoor! is that you?"

Lord Uxmoor looked up and knew him. He entered the hotel, and the next minute the waiter ushered him into Vizard's sitting-room.

Lord Uxmoor, like Mr. Vizard, was a landed proprietor in Barfordshire. The county is large, and they lived too many miles apart to visit; but they met, and agreed, at elections and county business, and had a respect for each other.

Meeting at Frankfort, these two found plenty to say to each other about home; and as Lord Uxmoor was alone, Vizard asked him to dine. "You will balance us," said he; "we are terribly over-petticoated, and one of them is an old maid. We generally dine at the *table-d'hôte*, but I have ordered dinner *here* to-day: we are going to the opera at Homburg. You are not obliged to do that, you know. You are in for a bad dinner, that is all."

"To tell the truth," said Lord Uxmoor, "I don't care for music."

"Then you deserve a statue for not pretending to love it. I adore it, for my part; and I wish I was going alone, for my

hens will be sure to cackle *mal apropos*, and spoil some famous melody with talking about it, and who sang it in London instead of listening to it, and thanking God for it, in deep silence."

Lord Uxmoor stared a little at this sudden sally, for he was unacquainted with Vizard's one eccentricity, having met him only on county business, at which he was extra rational, and passed for a great scholar. He really did suck good books as well as cigars.

After a few more words they parted till dinner-time.

Lord Uxmoor came to his appointment, and found his host and Miss Maitland, whom he knew; and he was in languid conversation with them, when a side-door opened, and in walked Fanny Dover, fair and bright, in Cambridge blue, her hair well dressed by Zoe's maid in the style of the day. Lord Uxmoor rose, and received his fair countrywoman with respectful zeal; he had met her once before. She too sparkled with pleasure at meeting a Barfordshire squire with a long pedigree, purse, and beard, three things she admired greatly.

In the midst of this, in glided Zoe, and seemed to extinguish everybody, and even to pale the lights, with her dark, yet sun-like beauty. She was dressed in a creamy-white satin that glinted like mother-of-pearl, its sheen and glory unfrittered with a single idiotic trimming; on her breast a large diamond cross. Her head was an Athenian sculpture—no chignon, but the tight coils of antiquity; at their side one diamond star sparkled vivid flame, by its contrast with those polished ebon snakes.

Lord Uxmoor was dazzled, transfixed at the vision, and bowed very low when Vizard introduced him in an off-hand way, saying, "My sister, Miss Vizard—but I daresay you have met her at the county balls."

"I have never been so fortunate," said Uxmoor humbly.

"I have," said Zoe; "that is, I saw you waltzing with Lady Betty Gore, at the race ball, two years ago."

"What!" said Vizard, alarmed. "Uxmoor, were you waltzing with Lady Betty Gore?"

"You have it on too high an authority for me to contradict."

Finding Zoe was to be trusted as a county chronicle, Vizard turned sharply to her and said, "And was he flirting with her?"

Zoe coloured a little and said, "Now, Harrington, how can I tell?"

"You little hypocrite," said Vizard, "who can tell better?"

At this retort Zoe blushed high, and the water came into her eyes.

Nobody minded that but Uxmoor, and Vizard went on to explain, "That Lady Betty Gore is as heartless a coquette as any in the county, and don't you flirt with her, or you will get entangled."

"You disapprove of her," said Uxmoor coolly; "then I give her up for ever." He looked at Zoe whilst he said this, and felt how easy it would be to resign Lady Betty and a great many more for this peerless creature. He did not mean her to understand what was passing in his mind; he did not know how subtle and observant the most innocent girl is in such matters. Zoe blushed and drew away from him. Just then Ned Severne came in, and Vizard introduced him to Uxmoor with great geniality and pride. The charming young man was in a black surtout, with a blue scarf, the very tint for his complexion.

The girls looked at one another, and in a moment Fanny was elected Zoe's agent: she signalled Severne, and when he came to her, she said, for Zoe, "Don't you know we are going to the opera at Homburg?"

"Yes, I know," said he; "and I hope you will have a pleasanter evening than I shall."

"You are not coming with us?"

"No," said he sorrowfully.

"You had better," said Fanny, with a deal of quiet point—more, indeed, than Zoe's pride approved.

"Not if Mr. Severne has something more attractive," said she, turning palish and pinkish by turns.

All this went on *sotto voce*, and Uxmoor, out of good breeding, entered into conversation with Miss Maitland and Vizard. Severne availed himself of this diversion, and fixed his eyes on Zoe with an air of gentle reproach, then took a letter out of his pocket and handed it to Fanny. She read it and gave it to Zoe.

It was dated from the "Golden Star," Homburg.

"Dear Ned,—I am worse to-day, and all alone. Now and then I almost fear I may not pull through. But perhaps that is through being so hipped. Do come and spend this evening with me like a good kind fellow.

"Telegraph reply. S. T."

"Poor fellow," said Ned; "my heart bleeds for him."

Zoe was affected by this, and turned liquid and loving eyes on "dear Ned." But Fanny stood her ground. "Go to 'S. T.' to-morrow morning, but don't desert 'Z. V.' and 'F. D.' to-night." Zoe smiled.

"But I have telegraphed," objected Ned.

"Then telegraph again—*not*," said Fanny firmly.

Now this was unexpected. Severne had set his heart upon *rouge et noir*, but still he was afraid of offending Zoe; and, besides, he saw Uxmoor with his noble beard and brown eyes casting rapturous glances at her. "Let Miss Vizard decide," said he. "Don't let me be so unhappy as to offend her twice in one day."

Zoe's pride and goodness dictated her answer, in spite of her wishes. She said in a low voice, "Go to your sick friend."

"There," said Severne.

"I hear," said Fanny. "She means 'go'; but you shall repent it."

"I mean what I say," said Zoe, with real dignity. "It is my habit." And the next moment she quietly left the room.

She sat down in her bedroom, mortified and alarmed. What! Had it come to this, that she felt her heart turn cold, just because that young man said he could not accompany her—on a single evening! Then first she discovered that it was for him she had dressed, and had for once beautified her beauty—for *him;* that with Fanny she had dwelt upon the delights of the music, but had secretly thought of appearing publicly on *his* arm, and dazzling people by their united and contrasted beauty.

She rose, all of a sudden, and looked keenly at herself in the glass, to see if she had not somehow overrated her attractions. But the glass was reassuring; it told her not one man in a million could go to a sick friend that night, when he might pass the evening by her side, and visit his friend early in the morning.

Tears of mortified vanity were in her eyes; but she smiled through them at the glass, then dried them carefully, and went back to the dining-room radiant to all appearance.

Dinner was just served, and her brother, to do honour to the new comer, waved his sister to a seat by Lord Uxmoor. He looked charmed at the arrangement, and showed a great desire to please her, but at first was unable to find good topics. After several timid overtures on his part, she assisted him, out of good nature. She knew, by report,

that he was a very benevolent young man, bent on improving the homes, habits, wages, and comforts of the agricultural poor. She led him to this, and his eyes sparkled with pleasure, and his homely but manly face lighted and was elevated by the sympathy she expressed in these worthy objects. He could not help thinking, "What a Lady Uxmoor this would make! She and I and her brother might leaven the county."

And all this time she would not even bestow a glance on Severne. She was not an angel. She had said, "Go to your sick friend;" but she had not said, "I will smart alone—if you *do*."

Severne sat by Fanny and seemed dejected, but, as usual, polite and charming. She was smilingly cruel; regaled him with Lord Uxmoor's wealth and virtues, and said he was an excellent match, and all she-Barfordshire pulling caps for him. Severne only sighed; he offered no resistance; and at last she could not go on nagging a handsome fellow who only sighed, so she said, "Well *there;* I advise you to join us before the opera is over, that is all."

"I will, I will!" said he eagerly. "Oh, thank you."

Dinner was despatched rather rapidly, because of the opera.

When the ladies got their cloaks and lace scarves to put over their heads coming home, the party proved to be only three, and the tickets five; for Miss Maitland pleaded headache.

On this, Lord Uxmoor said, rather timidly, he should like to go.

"Why, you said you hated music," said Vizard.

Lord Uxmoor coloured. "I recant," said he bluntly; and everybody saw what had operated his conversion.

It is half-an-hour by rail from Frankfort to Homburg, and the party could not be seated together Vizard bestowed Zoe and Lord Uxmoor in one carriage, Fanny and Severne in another, and himself and a cigar in a third. Severne sat gazing piteously on Fanny Dover, but never said a word. She eyed him satirically for a good while, and then she said cheerfully, "Well, Mr. Severne, how do you like the turn things are taking?"

"Miss Dover, I am very unhappy."

"Serves you right."

"Oh, pray don't say that. It is on you I depend."

"On me, sir! What have I to do with your flirtations?"

"No; but you are so clever, and so good. If, for once, you will take a poor fellow's part with Miss Vizard, behind my back; oh, please do—pray do," and, in the ardour of entreaty, he caught Fanny's white hand and kissed it with warm but respectful devotion. Indeed he held it, and kissed it again and again, till Fanny, though she minded it no more than marble, was going to ask him satirically whether he had not almost done with it, when at last he contrived to squeeze out one of his little hysterical tears, and drop it on her hand.

Now the girl was not butter, like some of her sex—far from it; but neither was she wood—indeed she was not old enough for that; so this crocodile tear won her for the time being. "There—there," said she; "don't be a baby. I'll be on your side to-night; only, if you care for her, come and look after her yourself. Beautiful women with money won't stand neglect, Mr. Severne; and why should they? They are not like poor me; they have got the game in their hands."

The train stopped. Vizard's party drove to the opera, and Severne ordered a cab "to the Golden Star," meaning to stop it and get out; but, looking at his watch, he found it wanted half-an-hour to gambling time, so he settled to have a cup of coffee first, and a cigar. With this view he let the man drive him to the "Golden Star."

CHAPTER III

Ina Klosking worked night and day upon "Siebel" in Gounod's "Faust," and the songs that had been added to give weight to the part.

She came early to the theatre at night, and sat, half dressed, fatigued, and nervous, in her dressing-room.

Crash!—the first *coup d'archet* announced the overture and roused her energy as if Ithuriel's spear had pricked her. She came down dressed, to listen at one of the upper entrances, to fill herself with the musical theme, before taking her part in it, and also to gauge the audience and the singers.

The man "Faust" was a German; but the musical part "Faust" seems better suited to an Italian or a Frenchman

Indeed some say that, as a rule, the German genius excels in creation, and the Italian in representation or interpretation. For my part I am unable to judge nations in the lump, as some fine fellows do, because nations are composed of very different individuals, and I know only one to the million; but I do take on me to say that the individual Herr who executed Doctor Faustus at Homburg that night, had everything to learn, except what he had to unlearn. His person was obese; his delivery of the words was mouthing, chewing, and gurgling; and he uttered the notes in tune, but without point, pathos, or passion; a steady lay-clerk from York or Durham Cathedral would have done a little better, because he would have been no colder at heart, and more exact in time, and would have sung clean; whereas this gentleman set his wind-pipe trembling, all through the business, as if palsy was passion. By what system of leverage such a man came to be hoisted on to such a pinnacle of song as "Faust," puzzled our English friends in front as much as it did the Anglo-Danish artist at the wing; for English girls know what is what in opera.

The "Marguerite" had a voice of sufficient compass, and rather sweet, though thin. The part demands a better *actress* than Patti, and this Fräulein was not half as good: she put on the painful grin of a prize-fighter who has received a staggerer, and grinned all through the part, though there is little in it to grin at.

She also suffered by having to play to a "Faust" milked of his poetry, and self-smitten with a "tremolo," which, as I said before, is the voice of palsy, and is not, nor ever was, nor ever will be, the voice of passion. Bless your heart! passion is a manly thing, a womanly thing, a grand thing; not a feeble quavering, palsied, anile, senile thing. Learn that, ye trembling, quavering idiots of song!

"They let me down," whispered Ina Klosking to her faithful Ashmead. "I feel all out of tune. I shall never be able. And the audience so cold. It will be like singing in a sepulchre."

"What would you think of them if they applauded?" said Ashmead.

"I should say they were good, charitable souls, and the very audience I shall want in five minntes."

"No, no," said Ashmead; "all you want is a discriminating audience; and this is one. Remember they have all seen

Patti in 'Marguerite.' Is it likely they would applaud this tin stick?"

Ina turned the conversation with feminine quickness—"Mr. Ashmead, have you kept your promise? my name is not in the programme?"

"It is not; and a great mistake, too."

"I have not been announced by name in any way?"

"No. But of course I have nursed you a bit."

"Nursed me? What is that? Oh, what have you been doing? No *charlatanerie*, I hope."

"Nothing of the kind," said Ashmead stoutly; "only the regular business."

"And pray what is the regular business?" inquired Ina distrustfully.

"Why, of course, I sent on the manager to say that Mademoiselle Schwab was taken seriously ill; that we had been fearing we must break faith with the public, for the first time. But that a cantatrice, who had left the stage, appreciated our difficulty, and had, with rare kindness, come to our aid for this one night; we felt sure a Humbug audience—what am I saying?—a Homburg audience would appreciate this, and make due allowance for a performance undertaken in such a spirit, and with imperfect rehearsals, &c.—in short, the usual patter; and the usual effect, great applause. Indeed the only applause that I have heard in this theatre to-night. Ashmead ahead of Gounod, so far."

Ina Klosking put both hands before her face, and gave a little moan. She had really a soul above these artifices. "So then," said she, "if they do receive me, it will be out of charity."

"No, no; but on your first night you must have two strings to your bow."

"But I have only one. These cajoling speeches are a waste of breath. A singer can sing, or she can *not* sing, and they find out which it is, as soon as she opens her mouth."

"Well, then, you open your mouth—that is just what half the singers can't do—and they will soon find out you can sing."

"I hope they may; I do not know. I am discouraged; I'm terrified; I think it is stage-fright," and she began to tremble visibly, for the time drew near.

Ashmead ran off, and brought her some brandy-and-water. She put her hand against it with royal scorn. "No, sir!

—if the theatre—and the lights—and the people—the mind of Goethe—and the music of Gounod, can't excite me without *that*, put me at the counter of a *café*, for I have no business here."

The power, without violence, and the grandeur with which she said this, would have brought down the house had she spoken it in a play without a note of music; and Ashmead drew back respectfully, but chuckled internally at the idea of this Minerva giving change in a *café*.

And now her cue was coming. She ordered everybody out of the entrance not very ceremoniously, and drew well back. Then, at her cue, she made a stately rush, and so, being in full swing before she cleared the wing, she swept into the centre of the stage with great rapidity and resolution; no trace either of her sorrowful heart or her quaking limbs was visible from the front.

There was a little applause, all due to Ashmead's preliminary apology, but there was no real reception; for Germany is large and musical, and she was not immediately recognised at Homburg. But there was that indescribable flutter which marks a good impression and keen expectation suddenly aroused. She was beautiful on the stage, for one thing; her figure rather tall and stately, and her face full of power; and then the very way she came on showed the step and carriage of an artist at home upon the boards.

She cast a rapid glance round the house, observed its size, and felt her way. She sang her first song evenly, but not tamely, yet with restrained power; but the tones were so full and flexible, the impression so easy yet exact, that the judges saw there was no effort, and suspected something big might be yet in store to-night. At the end of her song she did let out for a moment, and, at this well-timed foretaste of her power, there was applause, but nothing wonderful.

She was quite content, however. She met Ashmead as she came off, and said, "All is well, my friend, so far. They are sitting in judgment on me, like sensible people, and not in a hurry. I rather like that."

"Your own fault," said Joseph. "You should have been announced. Prejudice is a surer card than judgment. The public is an ass."

"It must come to the same thing in the end," said the Klosking firmly. "One can sing, or one cannot."

Her next song was encored, and she came off flushed with

art and gratified pride. "I have no fears now," said she to her Achates firmly. "I have my barometer; a young lady in the stalls. Oh, such a beautiful creature, with black hair and eyes! She applauds me fearlessly. Her glorious eyes speak to mine and inspire me. She is *happy*, she is. I drink sunbeams at her. I shall act and sing 'Le Parlate d'Amor' for *her*—and you will see."

Between the acts, who should come in but Ned Severne, and glided into the vacant stall by Zoe's side.

She quivered at his coming near her; he saw it, and felt a thrill of pleasure himself.

"How is 'S. T.'?" said she kindly.

"'S. T.?'" said he, forgetting.

"Why, your sick friend, to be sure."

"Oh, not half so bad as he thought. I was a fool to lose an hour of you for *him*. He was hipped; had lost all his money at *rouge et noir*. So I lent him fifty pounds, and that did him more good than the doctor. You forgive me?"

"Forgive you? I approve. Are you going back to him?" said she demurely.

"No, thank you, I have made sacrifices enough."

And so indeed he had, having got cleaned out of £300, through preferring gambling to beauty.

"Singers good?" he inquired.

"Wretched; all but one—and she is divine."

"Indeed! Who is she?"

"I don't know. A gentleman in black came out——"

"Mephistopheles?"

"No;—how dare you?—and said a singer that had retired would perform the part of 'Siebel,' to oblige; and she has obliged me for one. She is, oh, so superior to the others! Such a heavenly contralto; and her upper notes honey dropping from the comb. And then she is so modest, so dignified, *and* so beautiful. She is fair as a lily; and such a queen-like brow, and deep, deep grey eyes, full of sadness and soul. I'm afraid she is not happy. Once or twice she fixed them on me, and they magnetised me, and drew me to her. So I magnetised her in return. I should know her anywhere fifty years hence. Now, if I was a man, I should love that woman, and make her love me."

"Then I am very glad you are not a man," said Severne tenderly.

"So am I," whispered Zoe, and blushed.

The curtain rose.

"Listen, now, Mr. Chatterbox," said Zoe.

Ned Severne composed himself to listen; but Fräulein Graas had not sung many bars before he revolted. "Listen to what?" said he, "and look at what? The only 'Marguerite' in the place is by my side."

Zoe coloured with pleasure; but her good sense was not to be blinded. "The only good black Mephistophe-*less* you mean," said she. "To be 'Marguerite,' one must be great, and sweet, and tender; yes, and far more lovely than ever woman was. That lady is a better colour for the part than I am; but neither she nor I shall ever be 'Marguerite.'"

He murmured in her ear, "You are 'Marguerite,' for you could fire a man's heart so that he could sell his soul to gain you."

It was the accent of passion, and the sensitive girl quivered. Yet she defended herself—in words: "Hush!" said she; "that is wicked—out of an opera. Fanny would laugh at you, if she heard."

Here were two reasons for not making such hot love in the stalls of an opera. Which of the two weighed most with the fair reasoner shall be left to her own sex.

The brief scene ended with the declaration of the evil spirit that "Marguerite" is lost.

"There," said Zoe naïvely, "that is over, thank goodness; now you will hear *my* singer."

"Siebel" and "Marta" came on from opposite sides of the stage. "See!" said Zoe, "isn't she lovely?" and she turned her beaming face full on Severne, to share her pleasure with him. To her amazement the man seemed transformed; a dark cloud had come over his sunny countenance. He sat, pale, and seemed to stare at the tall, majestic, dreamy singer, who stood immovable, dressed like a velvet youth, yet looking like no earthly boy, but a draped statue of Mercury,

> "New lighted on a heaven-kissing hill."

The blood left his lips, and Zoe thought he was faint; but the next moment he put his handkerchief hastily to his nose, and wriggled his way out, with a rush and a crawl, strangely combined, at the very moment when the singer delivered her first commanding note of recitative.

Everybody about looked surprised and disgusted at so ill-timed an exit; but Zoe, who had seen his white face, was seriously alarmed, and made a movement to rise too, and watch, or even follow him; but, when he got to the side, he looked back to her, and made her a signal that his nose was bleeding, but it was of no great consequence. He even pointed with his finger out and then back again, indicating he should not be long gone.

This reassured her greatly; for she had always been told a little bleeding of that sort was good for hot-headed young people.

Then the singer took complete hold of her. The composer, to balance the delightful part of "Marguerite," has given "Siebel" a melody, with which wonders can be done; and the Klosking had made a considerable reserve of her powers for this crowning effort. After a recitative that rivalled the silver trumpet, she flung herself with immediate and electrifying ardour into the melody; the orchestra, taken by surprise, fought feebly for the old ripple, but the Klosking, resolute by nature, was now mighty as Neptune, and would have her big waves. The momentary struggle, in which she was loyally seconded by the conductor, evoked her grand powers. Catgut had to yield to brains, and the whole orchestra, composed, after all, of good musicians, soon caught the divine afflatus, and the little theatre seemed on fire with music; the air, sung with a large rhythm, swelled and rose, and thrilled every breast with amazement and delight; the house hung breathless; by-and-by there were pale cheeks, panting bosoms, and wet eyes, the true, rare triumphs of the sovereigns of song; and, when the last note had pealed and ceased to vibrate, the pent-up feelings broke forth in a roar of applause which shook the dome, followed by a clapping of hands like a salvo, that never stopped till Ina Klosking, who had retired, came forward again.

She curtsied with admirable dignity, modesty, and respectful gravity, and the applause thundered, and people rose at her in clusters about the house, and waved their hats and handkerchiefs at her, and a little Italian recognised her, and cried out as loud as he could, "Vivat la Klosking, vivat!" and she heard that, and it gave her a thrill; and Zoe Vizard, being out of England, and therefore brave as a lioness, stood boldly up at her full height, and taking her bouquet in the right hand, carried it swiftly to her left ear, and so flung it,

with a free back-handed sweep more oriental than English, into the air, and it lighted by the singer; and she saw the noble motion, and the bouquet fly, and, when she made her last curtsey at the wing, she fixed her eyes on Zoe, and then put her hand to her heart with a most touching gesture that said, "Most of all I value your bouquet and your praise."

Then the house buzzed, and ranks were levelled; little people spoke to big people, and big to little, in mutual congratulation; for at such rare moments (except in Anglo-Saxony) instinct seems to tell men that true art is a sunshine of the soul, and blesses the rich and the poor alike.

One person was affected in another way. Harrington Vizard sat rapt in attention, and never took his eyes off her, yet said not a word.

Several Russian and Prussian grandees sought an introduction to the new singer; but she pleaded fatigue. The manager entreated her to sup with him, and meet the Grand Duke of Hesse. She said she had a prior engagement.

She went quietly home, and supped with her faithful Ashmead, and very heartily too; for nature was exhausted, and agitation had quite spoiled her dinner.

Joseph Ashmead, in the pride of his heart, proposed a bottle of champagne. The Queen of Song, with triumph flushed, looked rather blue at that. "My friend," said she, in a meek, deprecating way, "we are working people; is not Bordeaux good enough for *us*?"

"Yes; but it is not good enough for the occasion," said Joseph, a little testily. "Well, never mind;" and he muttered to himself, "That is the worst of good women; they are so terribly stingy."

The Queen of Song, with triumph flushed, did not catch these words, but only a little growling. However, as supper proceeded, she became uneasy. So she rang the bell and ordered *a pint:* of this she drank one spoonful. The remainder, co-operating with triumph and claret, kept Ashmead in a great flow of spirits. He traced her a brilliant career. To be photographed to-morrow morning as "Siebel," and in plain dress. Paragraphs in *Era, Figaro, Galignani, Independance Belge,* and the leading dailies. Large woodcuts before leaving Homburg for Paris, London, Vienna, Petersburg, and New York.

"I'm in your hands," said she, and smiled languidly, to please him.

But by-and-by he looked at her, and found she was taking a little cry all to herself.

"Dear me!" said he; "what is the matter?"

"My friend, forgive me. *He* was not there to share my triumph."

CHAPTER IV.

As the opera drew to an end, Zoe began to look round more and more for Severne; but he did not come, and Lord Uxmoor offered his arm earnestly. She took it; but hung back a moment on his very arm, to tell Harrington Mr. Severne had been taken ill.

At the railway station the truant emerged suddenly, just as the train was leaving; but Lord Uxmoor had secured three seats, and the defaulter had to go with Harrington. On reaching the hotel, the ladies took their bed-candles; but Uxmoor found time to propose an excursion next day, Sunday, to a lovely little lake—open carriage, four horses. The young ladies accepted, but Mr. Severne declined; he thanked Lord Uxmoor politely, but he had arrears of correspondence.

Zoe cast a mortified, and rather a haughty glance on him; and Fanny shrugged her shoulders incredulously.

These two ladies brushed hair together in Zoe's room. That is a soothing operation, my masters, and famous for stimulating females to friendly gossip; but this time there was, for once, a guarded reserve. Zoe was irritated, puzzled, mortified, and even grieved by Severne's conduct. Fanny was gnawed by jealousy, and out of temper. She had forgiven Zoe Ned Severne. But that young lady was insatiable; Lord Uxmoor, too, had fallen openly in love with her; openly to a female eye. So then a blonde had no chance with a dark girl by; thus reasoned she, and it was intolerable.

It was some time before either spoke an atom of what was uppermost in her mind. They each doled out a hundred sentences that missed the mind and mingled readily with the atmosphere, being in fact mere preliminary and idle air; so two deer, in duel, go about and about, and even affect to look

another way, till they are ripe for collision. There be writers would give the reader all the preliminary puffs of articulated wind, and everybody would say, "How clever! That is just the way girls really talk." But I leave the glory of photographing nullities to the geniuses of the age, and run to the first word which could, without impiety, be called dialogue.

"Don't you think his conduct a little mysterious?" said Zoe, *mal àpropos* of anything that had been said hitherto.

"Well, yes; rather," said Fanny, with marked carelessness.

"First, a sick friend; then a bleeding at the nose; and now he won't drive to the lake with us: arrears of correspondence! Pooh!"

Now Fanny's suspicions were deeper than Zoe's. She had observed Severne keenly; but it was not her cue to speak. She yawned and said, "What *does* it matter?"

"Don't be unkind. It matters to *me*."

"Not it. You have another ready."

"What other? There is no one that I——Fanny."

"Oh, nonsense! The man is evidently smitten, and you keep encouraging him."

"No, I don't; I am barely civil. And don't be ill-natured. What *can* I do?"

"Why, be content with one at a time."

"It is very rude to talk so. Besides, I haven't got one, much less two. I begin to doubt *him;* and, Lord Uxmoor! you know I cannot possibly care for him—an acquaintance of yesterday."

"But you know all about him; that he is an excellent *parti*," said Fanny, with a provoking sneer.

This was not to be borne.

"Oh," said Zoe, "I see you want him for yourself. It is *you* that are not content with one. You forget how poor Harrington would miss your attentions. He would *begin* to appreciate them—when he had lost them."

This stung, and Fanny turned white and red by turns. "I deserve this," said she, "for wasting advice on a coquette."

"That is not true; I'm no coquette; and here I am, asking your advice, and you only snub me. You are a jealous, cross, unreasonable thing."

"Well, I'm not a hypocrite."

"I never was called so before," said Zoe, nobly and gently.

"Then you were not found out, that is all. You look so simple and ingenuous, and blush if a man says half a word to you; and all the time you are a greater flirt than I am."

"Oh, Fanny!" screamed Zoe, with horror.

It seems a repartee may be conveyed in a scream; for Fanny now lost her temper altogether. "Your conduct with those two men is abominable," said she. "I won't speak to you more."

"I beg you will *not*, in your present temper," said Zoe, with unaffected dignity, and rising like a Greek column.

Fanny flounced out of the room.

Zoe sat down and sighed, and her glorious eyes were dimmed. Mystery—doubt—and now a quarrel. What a day! At her age, a little cloud seems to darken the whole sky.

Next morning the little party met at breakfast. Lord Uxmoor, anticipating a delightful day, was in high spirits, and he and Fanny kept up the ball. She had resolved, in the silent watches of the night, to contest him with Zoe, and make every possible use of Severne in the conflict.

Zoe was silent and *distraite*, and did not even try to compete with her sparkling rival. But Lord Uxmoor's eyes often wandered from his sprightly companion to Zoe, and it was plain he longed for a word from her mouth.

Fanny observed, bit her lip, and tacked internally, "'bout ship," as the sailors say. Her game now, conceived in a moment, and at once put in execution, was to encourage Uxmoor's attentions to Zoe. She began by openly courting Mr. Severne, to make Zoe talk to Uxmoor, and also make him think that Severne and she were the lovers.

Her intentions were to utilise the coming excursion. She would attach herself to Harrington, and so drive Zoe and Uxmoor together; and then Lord Uxmoor, at his present rate of amorous advance, would probably lead Zoe to a detached rock, and make her a serious declaration. This good, artful girl felt sure such a declaration, made a few months hence in Barfordshire, would be accepted, and herself left in the cold. Therefore she resolved it should be made prematurely, and in Germany, with Severne at hand, and so in all probability come to nothing. She even glimpsed a vista of consequences, and in that little avenue discerned the figure of Fanny Dover playing the part of consoler, friend, and ultimately spouse, to a wealthy noble.

CHAPTER V

The letters were brought in: one was to Vizard, from Herries, announcing a remittance; one to Lord Uxmoor. On reading it, he was surprised into an exclamation, and his face expressed great concern.

"Oh!" said Zoe—"Harrington!"

Harrington's attention being thus drawn, he said, "No bad news, I hope?"

"Yes," said Uxmoor, in a low voice, "very bad. My oldest, truest, dearest friend has been seized with small-pox, and his life is in danger. He has asked for me, poor fellow. This is from his sister. I must start by the twelve o'clock train."

"Small-pox! why, it is contagious!" cried Fanny; "and so disfiguring!"

"I can't help that," said the honest fellow; and instantly rang the bell for his servant, and gave the requisite orders.

Zoe, whose eye had never left him all the time, said softly, "It is brave and good of you. We poor, emotional, cowardly girls should sit down and cry."

"*You* would not, Miss Vizard," said he firmly, looking full at her. "If you think you would, you don't know yourself."

Zoe coloured high and was silent.

Then Lord Uxmoor showed the true English gentleman. "I do hope," said he earnestly, though in a somewhat broken voice, "that you will not let this spoil the pleasure we had planned together. Harrington will be my deputy."

"Well, I don't know," said Harrington sympathisingly. Mr. Severne remarked, "Such an occurrence puts pleasure out of one's head." This he said, with his eyes on his plate, like one repeating a lesson. "Vizard, I entreat you," said Uxmoor, almost vexed. "It will only make me more unhappy if you don't."

"We will go," cried Zoe earnestly; "we promise to go. What does it matter? We shall think of you and your poor friend wherever we are. And I shall pray for him. But, ah! I know how little prayers avail to avert these cruel bereavements." She was young, but old enough to have prayed hard for her sick mother's life, and, like the rest of

us, prayed in vain. At this remembrance the tears ran undisguised down her cheeks.

The open sympathy of one so young and beautiful, and withal rather reserved, made Lord Uxmoor gulp; and, not to break down before them all, he blurted out that he must go and pack. With this he hurried away.

He was unhappy. Besides the calamity he dreaded, it was grievious to be torn away from a woman he loved at first sight, and just when she had come out so worthy of his love. She was a high-minded creature; she had been silent and reserved so long as the conversation was trivial; but, when trouble came, she was the one to speak to him bravely and kindly. Well, what must be, must. All this ran through his mind, and made him sigh; but it never occurred to him to shirk—to telegraph instead of going—nor yet to value himself on his self-denial.

They did not see him again till he was on the point of going, and then he took leave of them all, Zoe last. When he came to her, he ignored the others, except that he lowered his voice in speaking to her. "God bless you for your kindness, Miss Vizard. It is a little hard upon a fellow to run away from such an acquaintance, just when I have been so fortunate to make it."

"Oh, Lord Uxmoor," said Zoe innocently, "never mind that. Why, we live in the same county, and we are on the way home. All I think of is your poor friend; and do please telegraph—to Harrington."

He promised he would, and went away disappointed somehow at her last words.

When he was gone Severne went out on the balcony to smoke, and Harrington held a council with the young ladies. "Well now," said he, "about this trip to the lake."

"I shall not go for one," said Zoe resolutely.

"La!" said Fanny, looking carefully away from her to Harrington; "and *she* was the one that insisted."

Zoe ignored the speaker, and set her face stiffly towards Harrington. "She only *said* that to *him*."

Fanny.—"But unfortunately ears are not confined to the noble."

Zoe.—"Nor tongues to the discreet."

Both these remarks were addressed pointedly to Harrington.

"Hullo!" said he, looking from one flaming girl to the

other; "am I to be a shuttlecock? and your discreet tongues the battledores? What is up?"

"We don't speak," said the frank Zoe; "that is up."

"Why, what is the row?"

"No matter" (stiffly).

"No great matter, I'll be bound. 'Toll, toll the bell.' Here goes one more immortal friendship—quenched in eternal silence."

Both ladies bridled. Neither spoke.

"And dead silence, as ladies understand it, consists in speaking *at* one another instead of *to*."

No reply.

"That is well-bred taciturnity."

No answer.

"The dignified reserve that distinguishes an estrangement from a squabble."

No reply.

"Well, I admire permanent sentiments, good or bad; constant resolves, &c. Your friendship has not proved immortal; so now let us see how long you can hold spite—SIEVES!" Then he affected to start. "What is this? I spy a rational creature out on yonder balcony. I hasten to join him. 'Birds of a feather,' you know;" and with that he went out to his favourite, and never looked behind him.

The young ladies, indignant at the contempt the big man had presumed to cast upon the constant soul of woman, turned two red faces and four sparkling eyes to each other, with the instinctive sympathy of the jointly injured; but, remembering in time, turned sharply round again, and presented napes, and so sat sullen.

By-and-by a chilling thought fell upon them both at the same moment of time. The men were good friends as usual, safe by sex from tiffs, and could do without them; and a dull day impended over the hostile fair.

Thereupon the ingenious Fanny resolved to make a splash of some sort, and disturb stagnation. She suddenly cried out, "La! and the man is gone away; so what is the use?" This remark she was careful to level at bare space.

Zoe, addressing the same person—space, to wit—inquired of him if anybody in his parts knew to whom this young lady was addressing herself.

"To a girl that is too sensible not to see the folly of quarrelling about a man—*when he is gone,*" said Fanny.

"If it is me you mean," said Zoe stiffly, "*really* I am *surprised.* You forget we are at daggers drawn."

"No, I don't, dear; and parted for ever."

Zoe smiled at that against her will.

"Zoe!" (penitentially.)

"Frances!" (archly.)

"Come, cuddle me quick!"

Zoe was all round her neck in a moment, like a lace scarf, and there was violent kissing, with a tear or two.

Then they put an arm round each other's waists, and went all about the premises intertwined like snakes; and Zoe gave Fanny her cameo brooch, the one with the pearls round it.

The person to whom Vizard fled from the tongue of beauty was a delightful talker; he read two or three newspapers every day, and recollected the best things. Now it is not everybody can remember a thousand disconnected facts and recall them *apropos.* He was various, fluent, and above all superficial; and such are your best conversers; they have something good and strictly ephemeral to say on everything, and don't know enough of anything to impale their hearers. In my youth there talked in Pall Mall a gentleman known as "Conversation Sharp." He eclipsed everybody. Even Macaulay paled. Sharp talked all the blessed afternoon, and grave men listened enchanted; and of all he said, nothing stuck. Where be now your Sharpiana? The learned may be compared to mines; these desultory charmers are more like the ornamented cottage near Staines, forty or fifty rooms, and the whole structure one story high. The mine teems with solid wealth; but you must grope and trouble to come at it: it is easier and pleasanter to run about the cottage with a lot of rooms all on the ground-floor.

The mind and body both get into habits—sometimes apart, sometimes in conjunction. Nowadays we set the body to work the intellect, even in its lower form of mechanical labour: it is your clod that toddles about labouring. The Peripatetics did not endure; their method was not suited to man's microcosm. Bodily movements fritter mental attention. We *sit* at the feet of Gamaliel, or, as some call him, Tyndall; and we sit to Bacon and Adam Smith. But, when we are standing or walking, we love to take brains easy. If

this delightful chatterbox had been taken down shorthand and printed, and Vizard had been set down to Severni opuscula, 10 vols.—and, mind you, Severne had talked all ten by this time—the Barfordshire squire and old Oxonian would have cried out for "more matter with less words," and perhaps have even fled for relief to some shorter treatise, Bacon's "Essays," Browne's "Religio Medici," or Buckle's "Civilisation." But lounging in a balcony, and lazily breathing a cloud, he could have listened all day to his desultory, delightful friend, overflowing with little questions, little answers, little queries, little epigrams, little maxims *à la Rochefoucauld*, little histories, little anecdotes, little gossip, and little snapshots at every feather flying.

> "Quicquid agunt homines, votum, timor, ira, voluptas
> Gaudia, discursus, nostri farrago Severni."

But, alas! after an hour of touch-and go, of superficiality and soft delight, the desultory charmer fell on a subject he had studied. So then he bored his companion for the first time in all the tour.

But, to tell the honest truth, Mr. Severne had hitherto been pleasing his friend with a cold-blooded purpose. His preliminary gossip, that made the time fly so agreeably, was intended to oil the way; to lubricate the passage of a premeditated pill. As soon as he had got Vizard into perfect good-humour, he said, *àpropos* of nothing that had passed, "By-the-by, old fellow, that five hundred pounds you promised to lend me!"

Vizard was startled by this sudden turn of a conversation hitherto agreeable.

"Why, you have had three hundred and lost it," said he. "Now take my advice, and don't lose any more."

"I don't mean to. But I am determined to win back the three hundred, and a great deal more, before I leave this. I have discovered a system, an infallible one."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Harrington gravely. "That is the second step on the road to ruin; the gambler with a system is the confirmed maniac."

"What! because *other* systems have been tried, and proved to be false? Mine is untried, and it is mere prejudice to condemn it unheard."

"Propound it then," said Vizard. "Only please observe the bank has got its system—you forget that; and the bank's system is to take a positive advantage, which must win in

the long-run; therefore all counter-systems must lose in the long-run."

"But the bank is tied to a long run, the individual player is not."

This reply checked Vizard for a moment, and the other followed up his advantage. "Now, Vizard, be reasonable. What would the trifling advantage the bank derives from an incident, which occurs only once in twenty-eight deals, avail against a player who could foresee at any given deal whether the card that was going to come up the nearest thirty would be on the red or black?"

"No avail at all. God Almighty could break the bank every afternoon. *Après?* as we say in France. Do you pretend to omniscience?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, but prescience of isolated events, preceded by no *indicia*, belongs only to omniscience. Did they not teach you that much at Oxford."

"They taught me very little at Oxford."

"Fault of the place, eh? You taught *them* something, though; and the present conversation reminds me of it. In your second term, when every other man is still quizzed and kept down as a freshman, you were already a leader—a chief of misrule; you founded a whist-club in Trinity, the primmest college of all. The Dons rooted you out in college; but you did not succumb; you fulfilled the saying of Sidney Smith, that 'Cribbage should be played in caverns, and sixpenny whist in the howling wilderness.' Ha! ha! how well I remember riding across Bullington Green one fine afternoon, and finding four Oxford hacks haltered in a row, and the four undergraduates, who had hired them on a long tick, sitting cross-legged under the hedge, like Turks or tailors, round a rude table with the legs sawed down to stumps! You had two packs, and a portable inkstand, and were so hard at it that I put my mare's nose right over the quartette before you saw either her or me. That hedge was like a drift of odoriferous snow with the hawthorn-bloom, and primroses sparkled on its bank like topazes. The birds chirruped, the sky smiled, the sun burnt perfumes; and there sat my lord and his fellow-maniacs, snick-snack—pit-pat—cutting, dealing, playing, revoking, scoring, and exchanging I.O.U.'s not worth the paper."

"All true, but the revoking," said Severne merrily. "Monster! by the memory of those youthful days, I demand

a fair hearing." Then, gravely, "Hang it all, Vizard! I am not a fellow that is always intruding his affairs and his theories upon other men."

"No, no, no," said Vizard hastily, and half apologetically; "go on."

"Well, then, of course I don't pretend to foreknowledge—but I do to experience; and you know experience teaches the wise."

"Not to fling five hundred after three. There—I beg pardon. Proceed, instructor of youth."

"Do listen, then; experience teaches us that luck has its laws; and I build my system on one of them. If two opposite accidents are sure to happen equally often in a total of fifty times, people, who have not observed, expect them to happen turn about, and bet accordingly. But they don't happen turn about; they make short runs, and sometimes long ones. They positively avoid alternation. Have you not observed this at *trente et quarante?*"

"No."

"Then you have not watched the cards."

"Not much. The faces of the gamblers were always my study. *They* are instructive."

"Well, then, I'll give you an example outside, for the principle runs through all equal chances;—take the University boat-race; you have kept your eye on that?"

"Rather. Never missed one yet. Come all the way from Barfordshire to see it."

"Well, there's an example."

"Of chance? No, thank you. That goes by strength, skill, wind, endurance, chaste living, self-denial, and judicious training. Every winning boat is manned by virtues." His eye flashed, and he was as earnest all in a moment as he had been listless. A Continental cynic had dubbed this insular cynic mad.

The professor of chances smiled superior. "Those things decide each individual race, and the best men win, because it happens to be the only race that is never sold. But go farther back, and you find it is chance. It is pure chance that sends the best men up to Cambridge two or three years running, and then to Oxford. With this key, take the facts my system rests on. There are two. The first is, that in thirty and odd races and matches, the University luck has come out equal on the river and at Lord's; the second is, the luck has seldom alternated. I don't say never. But

look at the list of events; it is published every March. You may see there the great truth that even chances shun direct alternation. In this, properly worked, lies a fortune at Homburg, where the play is square. Red gains once; you back red next time and stop. You are on black, and win; you double. This is the game if you have only a few pounds. But with five hundred pounds you can double more courageously, and work the short run hard; and that is how losses are averted, and gains secured. Once at Wiesbaden I caught a *croupier* out on a holiday. It was Good Friday, you know. I gave him a stunning dinner. He was close as wax, at first—that might be the salt fish; but after the *rognons à la brochette*, and a bottle of champagne, he let out. I remember one thing he said. 'Monsieur; ce que fait la fortune de la banque ce n'est pas le petit avantage qu'elle tire du refait—quoique cela y est pour quelquechose—c'est la témérité de ceux qui perdent, et la timidité de ceux qui gagnent.'"

"And," says Vizard, "there is a French proverb founded on *experience*—

'C'est encore rouge qui perd,
Et encore noir,
Mais toujours Blanc qui gagne.'"

Severne, for the first time, looked angry and mortified; he turned his back, and was silent. Vizard looked at him uneasily, hesitated a moment, then flung the remainder of his cigar away, and seemed to rouse himself body and soul. He squared his shoulders, as if he was going to box the Demon of play for his friend, and he let out good sense right and left, and, indeed, was almost betrayed into eloquence. "What!" he cried—"you, who are so bright, and keen, and knowing in everything else, are you really so blinded by egotism and credulity as to believe that you can invent any method of betting at *rouge et noir* that has not been tried before you were born? Do you remember the first word in La Bruyère's famous work?"

"No," said Ned sulkily. "Read nothing but newspapers."

"Good lad. Saves a deal of trouble. Well, he begins 'Tout est dit;' 'Everything has been said;' and I say that, in your business, 'Tout est fait;' 'Everything has been done.' Every move has been tried before you existed, and the result of all is, that to bet against the bank, wildly or systematically, is to gamble against a rock. *Si monumenta*

quæris, circumspice. Use your eyes, man. Look at the Kursaal, its luxuries, its gardens, its gilding, its attractions, all of them cheap, except the one that pays for all: all these delights, and the rents, and the *croupiers,* and the servants, and the income and liveries of an unprincipled prince, who would otherwise be a poor but honest gentleman with one *bonne* instead of thirty blazing lackeys, all come from the gains of the bank, which are the losses of the players, especially of those that have got a system."

Severne shot in, "A bank was broken last week."

"Was it? Then all it lost has returned to it, or will return to it to-night; for gamblers know no day of rest."

"Oh, yes, they do. It is shut on Good Friday."

"You surprise me. Only three hundred and sixty-four days in the year! Brainless avarice is more reasonable than I thought. Severne, yours is a very serious case. You have reduced your income, that is clear; for an English gentleman does not stay years and years abroad, unless he has outrun the constable; and I feel sure gambling has done it. You had the fever from a boy. Bullington Green! 'As the twig's bent the tree's inclined.' Come, come—make a stand. We are friends. Let us help one another against our besetting foibles. Let us practise antique wisdom. Let us 'know ourselves,' and leave Homburg to-morrow, instead of Tuesday."

Severne looked sullen, but said nothing; then Vizard gave him too hastily credit for some of that sterling friendship, bordering on love, which warmed his own faithful breast. Under this delusion he made an extraordinary effort; he used an argument which, with himself, would have been irresistible. "Look here," said he, "I'll—won't you have a cigar?—there; now I'll tell you something—I have a mania as bad as yours; only mine is intermittent, thank heaven. I'm told a million women are as good as a million men, perhaps better. It may be so. But when I, an individual, stake my heart on lovely woman, she always turns out unworthy. With me the sex *avoids alternation.* Therefore I rail on them wholesale. It is not philosophical; but I don't do it to instruct mankind—it is to soothe my spleen. Well, would you believe it, once in every three years, in spite of my experience, I am always bitten again. After my lucid interval has expired, I fall in with some woman who seems not like the rest, but an angel. Then I,

though I am averse to the sex, fall an easy, an immediate victim to the individual."

"Love at first sight."

"Not a bit of it. If she is as beautiful as an angel, with the voice of a peacock or a guinea-hen—and, luckily for me, that is a frequent arrangement—she is no more to me than the fire-shovel. If she has a sweet voice, and pale eyes, I'm safe. Indeed I am safe against Juno, Venus, and Minerva, for two years and several months after the last; but when two events coincide—when my time is up, and the lovely, melodious female comes—then I am lost. Before I have seen her and heard her five minutes, I know my fate, and I never resist it. I never can; that is a curious part of the mania. Then commences a little drama, all the acts of which are stale copies; yet each time they take me by surprise as if they were new. In spite of past experience I begin all confidence and trust: by-and-by come the subtle but well-known signs of deceit; so doubt is forced on me; and then I am all suspicion, and so darkly vigilant, that soon all is certainty; for *les fourberies des femmes* are diabolically subtle, but monotonous. They seem to vary only on the surface. One looks too gentle and sweet to give any creature pain; I cherish her like a tender plant: she deceives me for the coarsest fellow she can find. Another comes the frank and candid dodge; she is very off-handed, she shows me it is not worth her while to betray: she deceives me like the other, and with as little discrimination. The next has a face of beaming innocence, and a limpid eye that looks like transparent candour. She gazes long and calmly in my face, as if her eye loved to dwell on me—gazes with the eye of a gazelle or a young hare—and the baby lips below outlie the hoariest male fox in the Old Jewry. But to complete the delusion, all my sweethearts and wives are romantic and poetical skin-deep, or they would not attract me; and all turn out vulgar to the core. By their lovers alone can you ever know them. By the men they can't love, and the men they do love, you find these creatures, that imitate sentiment so divinely, are hard, prosaic, vulgar little things, thinly gilt and double varnished."

"They are much better than we are; but you don't know how to take them," said Severne, with the calm superiority of success.

"No," replied Vizard drily; "curse me if I do. Well, I did hope I had out-grown my mania, as I have done the

toothache; for this time I had passed the fatal period, the three years. It is nearly four years now since I went through the established process—as fixed beforehand as the dyer's or the cotton-weaver's—adored her, trusted her blindly, suspected her, watched her, detected her, left her. By-the-by, she was my wife, the last; but that made no difference: she was neither better nor worse than the rest, and her methods and idiotic motives of deceit identical. Well, Ned, I was mistaken. Yesterday night I met my Fate once more."

"Where? in Frankfort?"

"No; at Homburg—at the opera. You must give me your word not to tell a soul."

"I pledge you my word of honour."

"Well; the lady who sang the part of 'Siebel.'"

"Siebel?" muttered Severne.

"Yes," said Vizard dejectedly.

Severne fixed his eyes on his friend with a strange expression of confusion and curiosity, as if he could not take it all in. But he said nothing, only looked very hard all the time.

Vizard burst out: "'O miseras hominum menteis, o pectora cæca!' There I sat in the stalls, a happy man comparatively, because my heart, though full of scars, was at peace, and my reason, after periodical abdications, had resumed its throne for good; so I, weak mortal, fancied. 'Siebel' appeared; tall, easy, dignified, and walking like a wave; modest, fair, noble, great, dreamy, and above all, divinely sad. The soul of womanhood and music poured from her honey lips; she conquered all my senses; I felt something like a bolt of ice run down my back. I ought to have jumped up and fled the theatre. I wish I had. But I never do. I am incurable. The charm deepened; and when she had sung 'Le Parlate d'Amor' as no mortal ever sang and looked it, she left the stage and carried my heart and soul away with her. What chance had I? Here shone all the beauties that adorn the body, all the virtues and graces that embellish the soul; they were wedded to poetry and ravishing music, and gave and took enchantment. I saw my paragon glide away like a goddess, past the scenery, and I did not see her meet her lover at the next step—a fellow with a wash-leather face, greasy locks in a sausage roll, and his hair shaved off his forehead—and snatch a pot of porter from his hands, and drain it to the dregs, and say, 'It is all right, Harry, *that* fetched 'em.' But I know by

experience she did: so *sauve qui peut*; dear friend and fellow-lunatic, for my sake and yours, leave Frankfort with me to-morrow."

Severne hung his head and thought hard. Here was a new and wonderful turn. He felt all manner of strange things; a pang of jealousy for one. He felt that on every account it would be wise to go; and, indeed, dangerous to stay. But a mania is a mania, and so he could not. "Look here, old fellow," he said; "if the opera was on to-morrow, I would leave my three hundred behind me, and sacrifice myself to you, sooner than expose you to the fascinations of so captivating a woman as Ina Klosking."

"Ina Klosking? Is that her name? How do *you* know?"

"I—I—fancy I heard so."

"Why, she was not announced. Ina Klosking! it is a sweet name," and he sighed.

"But you are quite safe from *her* for one day," continued Severne, "so you *must* be reasonable. I will go with you Tuesday, as early as you like; but do be a good fellow, and let me have the five hundred to try my system with to-morrow."

Vizard looked sad and made no reply.

Severne got impatient. "Why, what is it to a rich fellow like you? If I had twelve thousand acres in a ring fence no friend would ask me twice for such a trifling sum."

Vizard, for the first time, wore a supercilious smile at being so misunderstood, and did not deign a reply.

Severne went on mistaking his man: "I can give you bills for the money, and for the three hundred you did lend me."

Vizard did not receive this as expected. "Bills?" said he gravely. "What, do you do that sort of thing as well?"

"Why not, pray? So long as I'm the holder, not the drawer nor the acceptor. Besides, they are not accommodation bills, but good commercial paper."

"You are a merchant, then; are you?"

"Yes; in a small way. If you will allow me, I will explain."

He did so; and to save comments, yet enable the reader to appreciate his explanation, the true part of it is printed in italics; the mendacious portion in ordinary type.

"*My estate in Huntingdonshire is not very large; and there are mortgages on it,* for the benefit of other members of my family. I was always desirous to pay off these mortgages;

and took the best advice I could. *I have got an uncle:* he lives in the city. He put me on to a good thing. I bought a share in a trading vessel; she makes short trips, and turns her cargo often. She will take out paper to America, and bring back raw cotton: she will land that at Liverpool, and ship English hardware and cotton fabrics for the Mediterranean and Greece, and bring back currants from Zante, and lemons from Portugal. She goes for the nimble shilling. Well, you know ships wear out; *and if you varnish them rotten, and insure them high, and they go to glory, Mr. Plimsoll is down on you like a hammer.* So, when she had paid my purchase-money three times over, some fellows in the city made an offer for the *Rover:* that was her name. My share came to twelve hundred, and my uncle said I was to take it. *Now I always feel bound by what he decides.* They gave me four bills, for four hundred, three hundred, three hundred, and two hundred. The four hundred was paid at maturity. *The others are not due yet.* I have only to send them to London, and I can get the money back by Thursday; but you want me to start on Tuesday."

"That is enough," said Vizard wearily; "I will be your banker, and——"

"You are a good fellow," said Severne warmly.

"No, no; I am a weak fellow, and an injudicious one. But it is the old story. When a friend asks you what he thinks a favour, the right thing is to grant it at once. He doesn't want your advice; he wants the one thing he asks for. There, get me the bills, and I'll draw a cheque on Müller. Herries advised him by Saturday's post; so we can draw on Monday."

"All right, old man," said Severne, and went away briskly for the bills.

When he got from the balcony into the room, his steps flagged a little; it struck him that ink takes time to dry and more time to darken.

As the *Rover,* with her nimble cargoes, was first cousin to the *Flying Dutchman,* with his crew of ghosts, so the bills received by Severne as purchase-money for his ship, necessarily partook of that ship's aerial character. Indeed they existed, as the schoolmen used to say, *in posse,* but not *in esse.* To be less pedantic and more exact, they existed as slips of blank paper with a Government stamp. To give them a mercantile character for a time—viz., until presented for payment—they must be drawn by an imaginary shipowner or a

visionary merchant, and endorsed by at least one shadow and a man of straw.

The man of straw sat down to inscribe self and shadows, and became a dishonest writer of fiction; for the art he now commenced appears to fall short of forgery proper, but to be still more distinct from justifiable fiction. The ingenious Mr. Defoe's certificate by an aerial justice of the peace to the truth of his ghostly narrative comes nearest to it in my poor reading.

Qualms he had, but not deep. If the bills were drawn by Imagination, accepted by Fancy, and endorsed by Impudence, what did it matter to Ned Straw, since his system would enable him to redeem them at maturity? His only real concern was to conceal their recent origin. So he wrote them with a broad-nibbed pen, that they might be the blacker, and set them to dry in the sun.

He then proceeded to a change of toilet.

While thus employed, there was a sharp tap at his door, and Vizard's voice outside. Severne started with terror, snapped up the three bills with the dexterity of a conjurer—the handle turned—he shoved them into a drawer—Vizard came in—he shut the drawer and panted.

Vizard had followed the custom of Oxonians amongst themselves, which is to knock and then come in, unless forbidden.

"Come," said he cheerfully, "those bills; I'm in a hurry to cash them now, and end the only difference we have ever had, old fellow."

The blood left Severne's cheek and lips for a moment, and he thought swiftly and hard. The blood returned along with his ready wit. "How good you are!" said he: "but no; it is Sunday."

"Sunday!" shouted Vizard. "What is that to you, a fellow who has been years abroad?"

"I can't help it," said Severne apologetically. "I am superstitious—don't like to do business on a Sunday. I would not even shunt at the tables on a Sunday—I don't think."

"Ah, you are not quite sure of that; there *is* a limit to your superstition! Well, will you listen to a story on a Sunday?"

"Rather."

"Then, once on a time there was a Scotch farmer who had a bonny cow; and another farmer coveted her honestly.

One Sunday they went home together from kirk, and there was the cow grazing. Farmer 2 stopped, eyed her, and said to Farmer 1—'Gin it were Monday, as it is the Sabba' day, what would ye tak' for your coo?' The other said it would be nine pounds, *if it was Monday.* And so they kept the Sabbath; and the cow changed hands; though, to the naked eye, she grazed on *in situ.* Our negotiation is just as complete. So what does it matter whether the actual exchange of bills and cash takes place to-day or to-morrow?"

"Do you really mean to say it does not matter to you?" asked Severne.

"Not one straw."

"Then, as it does not matter to you, and does to me, give me my foolish way, like a dear good fellow."

"Now, that is smart," said Vizard—"very smart;" then, with a look of parental admiration—"he gets his own way in everything. He *will* have your money—he *won't* have your money. I wonder whether he *will* consent to walk those girls out, and disburden me of their too profitable discourse."

"That I will, with pleasure."

"Well, they are at luncheon—with their bonnets on."

"I will join them in five minutes."

After luncheon, Miss Vizard, Miss Dover, and Mr. Severne started for a stroll.

Miss Maitland suggested that Vizard should accompany them.

"Couldn't think of deserting you," said he drily.

The young ladies giggled, because these two rarely opened their mouths to agree—one being a professed woman-hater and the other a man-hater.

Says Misander, in a sourish way, "Since you value my conversation so, perhaps you will be good enough not to smoke for the next ten minutes."

Misogyn consented, but sighed. That sigh went unpitied, and the lady wasted no time.

"Do you see what is going on between your sister and that young man?"

"Yes; a little flirtation."

"A great deal more than that. I caught them, in this very room, making love."

"You alarm me," said Vizard, with marked tranquillity.

"I saw him—kiss—her—hand."

"You relieve me," said Vizard, as calmly as he had been alarmed. "There is no harm in that. I've kissed the Queen's hand, and the nation did not rise upon me. However, I object to it; the superior sex should not play the spaniel. I will tell him to drop that. But, permit me to say all this is in your department, not mine."

"But what can I do against three of them, unless you support me? There you have let them go out together."

"Together with Fanny Dover, you mean?"

"Yes; and if Fanny had any designs on him Zoe would be safe——"

"And poor Ned torn in two."

"But Fanny, I am grieved to say, seems inclined to assist this young man with Zoe; that is, because it does not matter to her. She has other views—serious ones."

"Serious! What? A nunnery? Then I pity my lady abbess."

"Her views are plain enough to anybody but you."

"Are they? Then make me as wise as my neighbours."

"Well, then, she means to marry *you*."

"What! Oh, come!—that is too good a joke!"

"It is sober earnest. Ask Zoe—ask your friend Mr. Severne—ask the chamber-maids—ask any creature with an eye in its head. Oh the blindness of you men!"

The Misogyn was struck dumb. When he recovered, it was to repine at the lot of man.

"Even my own familiar cousin—once removed—in whom I trusted! I depute you to inform her that I think her *adorable*, and that matrimony is no longer a habit of mine. Set her on to poor Severne; he is a ladies' man, and 'the more the merrier' is his creed."

"Such a girl as Fanny is not to be diverted from a purpose of that sort. Besides, she has too much sense to plunge into the Severne and—pauperism! She is bent on a rich husband, not a needy adventurer."

"Madam, in my friend's name, I thank you."

"You are very welcome, sir—it is only the truth." Then, with a swift return to her original topic: "No; I know perfectly well what Fanny Dover will do this afternoon. She sketches."

"It is too true," said Vizard dolefully: "showed me a ship in full sail, and I praised it *in my way*. I said, 'That rock is rather well done.'"

"Well, she will be seized with a desire to sketch. She will sit down apart and say: 'Please don't watch me—it makes me nervous.' The other two will take the hint, and make love a good way off; and Zoe will go greater lengths with another woman in sight—but only just in sight, and slyly encouraging her—than if she was quite alone with her *mauvais sujet.*"

Vizard was pleased with the old lady.

"This is sagacious," said he, "and shows an eye for detail. I recognise in your picture the foxy sex. But, at this moment, who can foretell which way the wind will blow? You are not aware, perhaps, that Zoe and Fanny have had a quarrel. They don't speak. Now, in women, you know, vices are controlled by vices—see Pope. The conspiracy you dread will be averted by the other faults of their character, their jealousy, and their petulant tempers. Take my word for it, they are sparring at this moment; and that poor silly Severne mediating and moderating, and getting scratched on both sides for trying to be just."

At this moment the door opened, and Fanny Dover glittered on the threshold in Cambridge blue.

"There," said Vizard; "did not I tell you? They are come home."

"Only me," said Fanny gaily.

"Where are the others?" inquired Miss Maitland sharply.

"Not far off—only by the river-side."

"And you left those two alone!"

"Now don't be cross, aunt," cried Fanny, and limped up to her. "These new boots are so tight, I really couldn't bear them any longer. I believe I shall be lame as it is."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself. What will the people say?"

"La, aunt! it is Abroad. One does what one likes—out of England."

"Here's a code of morals!" said Vizard, who must have his slap.

"Nonsense," said Miss Maitland; "she will be sure to meet somebody. All England is on the Rhine at this time of year; and, whether or no, is it for you to expose that child to familiarity with a person nobody knows, nor his family either? You are twenty-five years old; you know the world; you have as poor an opinion of the man as I have, or you would have set your own cap at him—you know you would; and

you have let out things to me when you were off your guard. Fanny Dover, you are behaving wickedly; you are a false friend to that poor girl."

Upon this, lo! the pert Fanny, hitherto so ready with her answers, began to cry bitterly; the words really pricked her conscience; and to be scolded is one thing, to be severely and solemnly reproached is another—and before a man!

The official woman-hater was melted in a moment by the saucy girl's tears. "There—there," said he kindly; "have a little mercy. Hang it all! don't make a mountain of a mole-hill."

The official man-hater never moved a muscle. "It is no use her crying to *me:* she must give me a *proof* she is sorry. Fanny, if you are a respectable girl, and have any idea of being my heir, go you this moment and bring them home."

"Yes, aunt," said Fanny eagerly; and went off with wonderful alacrity.

It was a very long apartment, full forty feet; and while Fanny bustled down it, Miss Maitland extended a skinny finger, like one of Macbeth's witches, and directed Vizard's eye to the receding figure so pointedly, that he put up his spy-glass the better to see the phenomenon.

As Fanny skipped out and closed the door, Miss Maitland turned to Vizard, with lean finger still pointing after Fanny, and uttered a monosyllable—

"LAME!"

Vizard burst out laughing. "*La fourbe!*" said he. "Miss Maitland, accept my compliments; you possess the key to a sex no fellow can unlock. And now I have found an interpreter, I begin to be interested in this little comedy. The first act is just over. There will be half an hour's wait till the simulatrix of infirmity comes running back with the pilgrims of the Rhine. Are they 'the pilgrims of the Rhine' or 'the pilgrims of Love?' Time will show. Play to recommence with a verbal encounter: you will be one against three; for all that, I don't envy the greater number."

"Three to one? No. Surely you will be on the right side for once."

"Well, you see, I am the audience. We can't be all *dramatis personæ,* and no spectator. During the wait, I wonder whether the audience, having nothing better to do, may be permitted to smoke a cigar."

"So long a lucid interval is irksome, of course. Well, the balcony is your smoking-room. You will see them coming, please tap at my door the moment you do."

Half an hour elapsed, an hour, and the personages required to continue the comedy did not return.

Vizard, having nothing better to do, fell to thinking of Ina Klosking, and that was not good for him. Solitude and *ennui* fed his mania, and at last it took the form of action. He rang and ordered up his man Harris, a close, discreet personage, and directed him to go over to Homburg and bring back all the information he could about the new singer; her address in Homburg, married or single, prude or coquette. Should information be withheld, Harris was to fee the porter at the opera-house, the waiter at her hotel, and all the human commodities that knew anything about her.

Having dismissed Harris, he lighted his seventh cigar and said to himself, "It is all Ned Severne's fault. I wanted to leave for England to-day."

The day had been overcast for some time, and now a few big drops fell, by way of warning. Then it turned cool; then came a light drizzling rain, and in the middle of this, Fanny Dover appeared, almost flying home.

Vizard went and tapped at Miss Maitland's door. She came out.

"Here's Miss Dover coming, but she is alone."

CHAPTER VI

The next moment Fanny bounced into the room, and startled a little at the picture of the pair ready to receive her; she did not wait to be taken to task, but proceeded to avert censure by volubility and self-praise. "Aunt, I went down to the river, where I left them, and looked all along it, and they were not in sight. Then I went to the cathedral, because that seemed the next likeliest place. Oh, I have had such a race!"

"Why did you come back before you had found them?"

"Aunt, it was going to rain; and it is raining now, hard."

"*She* does not mind that."

"Zoe? Oh, she has got nothing on!"

"Bless me!" cried Vizard. "Godiva *rediviva.*"

"Now, Harrington, don't: of course I mean nothing to spoil; only her purple alpaca, and that is two years old. But my blue silk, I can't afford to ruin *it.* Nobody would give me another, *I* know."

"What a heartless world," said Vizard drily.

"It is past a jest, the whole thing," objected Miss Maitland; "and now we are together, please tell me, if you can, either of you, who *is* this man? What are his means? I know 'the Peerage,' 'the Baronetage,' and 'the Landed Gentry,' but not Severne. That is a river, not a family."

"Oh," said Vizard, "family names taken from rivers are never *parvenus.* But we can't all be down in Burke. Ned is of a good stock, the old English yeoman, the country's pride."

"Yeoman?" said the Maitland, with sovereign contempt.

Vizard resisted. "Is this the place to sneer at an English yeoman, where you see an unprincely prince living by a gambling-table? What says the old stave?—

> 'A German prince, a marquis of France,
> And a laird o' the North Countrie;
> A yeoman o' Kent, with his yearly rent,
> Would ding 'm out, all three.'"

"Then," said Misander, with a good deal of malicious intent, "you are quite sure your yeoman is not a—*pauper*—an *adventurer*——"

"Positive."

"And a *gambler.*"

"No, I am not at all sure of that. But nobody is all-wise. I am not, for one. He is a fine fellow; as good as gold; as true as steel: always polite, always genial; and never speaks ill of any of you behind your backs."

Miss Maitland bridled at that. "What I have said is not out of dislike to the young man. I am warning a brother to take a little more care of his sister, that is all. However, after your sneer, I shall say no more behind Mr. Severne's back, but to his face—that is, if we ever see his face again, or Zoe's either."

"Oh, aunt!" said Fanny reproachfully. "It is only the rain. La, poor things, they will be wet to the skin! Just see how it is pouring!"

"That it is: and let me tell you there is nothing so dangerous as a *tête-à-tête* in the rain."

"A thunderstorm is worse, aunt," said Fanny eagerly, "because then she is frightened to death, and clings to him—*if he is nice.*"

Having galloped into this revelation, through speaking first and thinking afterwards, Fanny pulled up short the moment the words were out, and turned red, and looked askant under her pale lashes at Vizard. Observing several twinkles in his eyes, she got up hastily, and said she really must go and dry her gown.

"Yes," said Miss Maitland, "come into my room, dear."

Fanny complied, with rather a rueful face, not doubting that the public "dear" was to get it rather hot in private.

Her uneasiness was not lessened when the old maid said to her grimly, "Now sit you down there, and never mind your dress."

However, it came rather mildly after all. "Fanny, you are not a bad girl, and you have shown you were sorry: so I am not going to be hard on you; only you must be a good girl now, and help me to undo the mischief, and then I will forgive you."

"Aunt," said Fanny piteously, "I am older than she is, and I know I have done rather wrong, and I won't do it any more; but pray, pray, don't ask me to be unkind to her to-day—it is Brooch-day."

Miss Maitland only stared at this obscure announcement: so Fanny had to explain that Zoe and she had tiffed, and made it up, and Zoe had given her a brooch. Hereupon she went for it, and both ladies forgot the topic they were on, and every other, to examine the brooch.

"Aunt," says Fanny, handling the brooch and eyeing it, "you were a poor girl like me before grandpapa left you the money, and you know it is just as well to have a tiff now and then with a rich one, because, when you kiss and make it up, you always get some Reconciliation Thing or other."

Miss Maitland dived into the past and nodded approval.

Thus encouraged, Fanny proceeded to more modern rules. She let Miss Maitland know it was always understood at her school that on these occasions of tiff, reconciliation, and present, the girl who received the present was to side in everything with the girl who gave it, for that one day. "That is the real reason I put on my tight boots—to earn my brooch. Isn't it a duck?"

"*Are* they tight, then?"

"Awfully. See—new on to-day."

"But you could shake off your lameness in a moment."

"La, aunt, you know one can fight *with* that sort of thing, or fight *against* it. It is like colds, and headaches, and fevers, and all that. You are in bed, too ill to see anybody you don't much care for. Night comes, and then you jump up and dress, and go to a ball, and leave your cold and your fever behind you, because the ball won't wait till you are well, and the bores will. So don't ask me to be unkind to Zoe, brooch-day," said Fanny, skipping back to her first position with singular pertinacity.

"Now, Fanny," said Miss Maitland, "who wants you to be unkind to her? But you must and shall promise me not to lend her any more downright encouragement, and to watch the man well."

"I promise that faithfully," said Fanny—an adroit concession, since she had been watching him like a cat a mouse for many days.

"Then you are a good girl; and to reward you I will tell you in confidence all the strange stories I have discovered to-day."

"Oh, do, aunt!" cried Fanny; and now her eyes began to sparkle with curiosity.

Miss Maitland then bade her observe that the French casement was ajar.

"Those two were smoking and talking secrets; and, child," said the old lady, very impressively, "if you—want—to—know—what gentlemen really are, you must be out of sight, and listen to them, smoking. When I was a girl, the gentlemen came out in their true colours over their wine. Now they are as close as wax, drinking; and even when they are tipsy they keep their secrets. But once let them get by themselves and smoke, the very air is soon filled with scandalous secrets none of the ladies in the house never dreamed of. Their real characters, their true histories, and their genuine sentiments, are locked up like that genii in the 'Arabian Nights,' and come out in smoke as he did." The old lady chuckled at her own wit, and the young one laughed to humour her. "Well, my dear, those two smoked, and revealed themselves—their real selves; and I listened and heard every word on the top of those drawers."

Fanny looked at the drawers. They were high.

"La, aunt, how ever did you get up there?"

"By a chair."

"Oh, fancy you perched up there, listening, at your age!"

"You need not keep throwing my age in my teeth. I am not so very old. Only I don't paint, and whiten, and wear false hair. There are plenty of coquettes about, ever so much older than I am. I have a great mind not to tell you; and then much you will ever know about either of these men."

"Oh, aunt, don't be cruel! I am dying to hear it."

As aunt was equally dying to tell it, she passed over the skit upon her age, though she did not forget nor forgive it; and repeated the whole conversation of Vizard and Severne with rare fidelity; but, as I abhor what the evangelist calls "battology," and Shakespeare "damnable iteration," I must draw upon the intelligence of the reader (if any), and he must be pleased to imagine the whole dialogue of those two unguarded smokers, repeated to Fanny, and interrupted, commented on at every salient point, scrutinised, sifted, dissected, and taken to pieces by two keen women, sharp by nature, and sharper now by collision of their heads. No candour, no tolerance, no allowance for human weakness, blunted the scalpel in their dexterous hands.

Oh gossip! delight of ordinary souls, and more delightful still when you furnish food for detraction!!!

To Fanny, in particular, it was exciting, ravishing; and the time flew by so unheeded, that presently there came a sharp knock, and an impatient voice cried, "Chatter!—Chatter!—Chatter!—how long are we to be kept waiting for dinner, all of us?"

CHAPTER VII

At the very commencement of the confabulation, so barbarously interrupted before it had lasted two hours and a half, the Misogyn rang the bell, and asked for Rosa, Zoe's maid.

She came, and he ordered her to have up a basket of wood, and light a roaring fire in her mistress's room, and put out garments to air. He also inquired the number of Zoe's bedroom. The girl said it was "No. 74."

The Misogyn waited half-an-hour, and then visited "No. 74." He found the fire burnt down to one log, and some things airing at the fire, as domestics air their employers' things, but not their own, you may be sure. There was a

chemise carefully folded into the smallest possible compass, and doubled over a horse at a good distance from the cold stove. There were other garments and supplementaries, all treated in the same way.

The Misogyn looked, and remarked as follows: "Idiots!—at everything, but taking in the men."

Having relieved his spleen with this courteous and comprehensive observation, he piled log upon log till the fire was half up the chimney. Then he got all the chairs and made a semi-circle, and spread out the various garments to the genial heat; and so close that, had a spark flown, they would have been warmed with a vengeance, and the superiority of the male intellect demonstrated. This done, he retired with a guilty air; for he did not want to be caught meddling in such frivolities by Miss Dover or Miss Maitland. However, he was quite safe; those superior spirits were wholly occupied with the loftier things of the mind, especially the characters of their neighbours.

I must now go for these truants that are giving everybody so much trouble.

When Fanny fell lame, and said she was very sorry, but she must go home and change her boots, Zoe was for going home too. But Fanny, doubting her sincerity, was peremptory, and said they had only to stroll slowly on and then turn; she should meet them coming back. Zoe coloured high, suspecting they had seen the last of this ingenious young lady.

"What a good girl!" cried Severne.

"I am afraid she is a very naughty girl," said Zoe faintly; and the first effect of Fanny's retreat was to make her a great deal more reserved and less sprightly.

Severne observed and understood, and saw he must give her time. He was so respectful as well as tender that, by degrees, she came out again, and beamed with youth and happiness.

They strolled very slowly by the fair river, and the pretty little nothings they said to each other began to be mere vehicles for those soft tones and looks, in which love is made, far more than by the words themselves.

When they started on this walk, Severne had no distinct nor serious views on Zoe. But he had been playing with fire for some time, and so now he got well burnt.

Walking slowly by his side, and conscious of being wooed, whatever the words might be, Zoe was lovelier than ever.

Those lowered lashes, that mantling cheek, those soft, tender murmurs, told him he was dear, and thrilled his heart, though a cold one compared with hers.

He was in love—as much as he could be, and more than he had ever been before. He never even asked himself whether permanent happiness was likely to spring from this love: he was self-indulgent, reckless, and in love.

He looked at her, wished he could recall his whole life, and sighed.

"Why do you sigh?" said she gently.

"I don't know. Yes, I do. Because I am not happy."

"Not happy?" said she. "You ought to be; and I am sure you deserve to be."

"I don't know that. However, I think I shall be happier in a few minutes, or else very unhappy indeed. That depends on you."

"On me, Mr. Severne?" and she blushed crimson, and her bosom began to heave. His words led her to expect a declaration and a proposal of marriage.

He saw her mistake; and her emotion spoke so plainly and sweetly, and tried him so, that it cost him a great effort not to clasp her in his arms. But that was not his cue at present. He lowered his eyes to give her time, and said sadly, "I cannot help seeing that, somehow, there is suspicion in the air about me. Miss Maitland puts questions, and drops hints. Miss Dover watches me like a lynx. Even you gave me a hint the other day that I never talk to you about my relations and my past life."

"Pray do not confound me with other people," said Zoe proudly. "If I am curious, it is because I know you must have done many good things, and clever things; but you have too little vanity, or too much pride, to tell them even to one who—esteems you, and could appreciate."

"I know you are as generous and noble as most people are narrow-minded," said Severne enthusiastically; "and I have determined to tell you all about myself."

Zoe's cheeks beamed with gratified pride, and her eyes sparkled.

"Only, as I would not tell it to anybody but you, I must stipulate that you receive it in sacred confidence, and not repeat it to a living soul."

"Not even to my brother, who loves you so?"

"Not even to him."

This alarmed the instinctive delicacy and modesty of a truly virgin soul.

"I am not experienced," said she. "But I feel I ought not to yield to curiosity and hear from you anything I am forbidden to tell my brother. You might as well say I must not tell my mother; for dear Harrington is all the mother I have; and I am sure he is a true friend to you" (this last a little reproachfully).

But for Severne's habitual self-command, he would have treated this delicacy as ridiculous prudery; but he was equal to greater difficulties.

"You are right, by instinct, in everything. Well, then, I shall tell you, and you shall see at once whether it ought to be repeated, or to remain a sacred deposit between me and the only creature I have the courage to tell it to."

Zoe lowered her eyes and marked the sand with her parasol. She was a little puzzled now, and half conscious that, somehow, he was tying her to secrecy with silk instead of rope; but she never suspected the deliberate art and dexterity with which it was done.

Severne then made the revelation, which he had been preparing for a day or two past; and to avoid external comments by the author, I must once more call in the artful aid of the printers. The true part of Mr. Severne's revelation is in italics; the false in ordinary type.

"*When my father died, I inherited an estate in Huntingdonshire. It was not so large as Vizard's, but it was clear. Not a mortgage nor encumbrance on it. I had a younger brother;* a fellow with charming manners and very accomplished. These were his ruin: he got into high society in London: *but high society is not always good society.* He became connected with a fast lot, some of the young nobility. Of course he could not vie with them. He got deeply in debt. Not but what they were in debt too, every one of them. He used to send to me for money oftener than I liked; but I never suspected the rate he was going at. I was anxious too, about him; but I said to myself he was just sowing his wild oats like other fellows. Well, it went on, until—to his misfortune and mine—he got entangled in some disgraceful transactions; the general features are known to all the world. I daresay you have heard of one or two young noblemen who committed forgeries on their relations and friends some years ago. *One of them, the son of an earl, took his sister's whole fortune out of her bank, with a single forged cheque. I*

believe the sum total of his forgeries were over £100,000. His father could not find half the money. A number of the nobility had to combine to repurchase the documents; many of them were in the hands of the Jews; aud I believe a composition was effected with the help of a very powerful barrister, an M.P. He went out of his line on this occasion, and mediated between the parties. What will you think when I tell you that my brother, the son of my father and my mother, was one of these forgers; a criminal?"

"My poor friend!" cried Zoe, clasping her innocent hands.

"It was a thunderclap. I had a great mind to wash my hands of it, and let him go to prison. But how could I? The struggle ended in my doing like the rest. Only poor I had no noble kinsmen with long purses to help me, and no Solicitor-General to mediate *sub rosa*. The total amount would have swamped my family acres. I got them down to sixty per cent., and that only crippled my estate for ever. As for my brother, he fell on his knees to me. But I could not forgive him. *He left the country with a hundred pounds* I gave him. *He is in Canada: and only known there as a most respectable farmer.* He talks of paying me back. That I shall believe when I see it. All I know for certain is that his crime has mortgaged my estate, and left me poor—and suspected."

Whilst Severne related this, there passed a somewhat notable thing in the world of mind. The inventor of this history did not understand it; the hearer did, and accompanied it with innocent, sympathetic sighs. Her imagination, more powerful and precise than the inventor's, pictured the horror of the high-minded brother, his agony, his shame, his respect for law and honesty, his pity for his own flesh and blood, his struggle, and the final triumph of fraternal affection. Every line of the figment was alive to her, and she *realised* the tale. Severne only repeated it.

At the last touch of his cold art the warm-hearted girl could contain no longer.

"Oh! poor Mr. Severne!" she cried; "poor Mr. Severne!" and the tears ran down her cheeks.

He looked at her first with a little astonishment—fancy taking his little narrative to heart like that!—then with compunction, and then with a momentary horror at himself, and terror at the impassable gulf fixed between them, by her rare goodness and his depravity.

Then for a moment he felt; and felt all manner of things at once. "Oh, don't cry," he blurted out, and began to blubber himself at having made her cry at all, and so unfairly. It was his lucky hour; this hysterical effusion, undignified by a single grain of active contrition, or even penitent resolve, told in his favour. They mingled their tears; and hearts cannot hold aloof when tears come together. Yes, they mingled their tears, and the crocodile tears were the male's, if you please, and the woman's tears were pure holy drops, that angels might have gathered and carried them to God for pearls of the human soul.

After they had cried together over the cool figment, Zoe said: "I do not repent my curiosity now. You did well to tell me. Oh no, you were right and I will never tell anybody. People are narrow-minded. They shall never cast your brother's crime in your teeth, nor your own losses I esteem you for—oh so much more than ever! I wonder you could tell me."

"You would not wonder if you knew how superior you are to all the world: how noble, how generous, and how I——"

"Oh, Mr. Severne, it is going to rain. We must get home as fast as ever we can."

They turned, and Zoe, with true virgin coyness and elastic limbs, made the coming rain an excuse for such swift walking, that Severne could not make tender love to her. To be sure Apollo ran after Daphne, with his little proposals; but I take it he ran mute—till he found he couldn't catch her. Indeed it was as much as Severne could do to keep up with her "fair heel and toe." But I ascribe this to her not wearing high heels, ever since Fanny told her she was just a little too tall, and she was novice enough to believe her.

She would not stop for the drizzle; but at last it came down with such a vengeance, that she was persuaded to leave the path and run for a cattle-shed at some distance. Here she and Severne were imprisoned. Luckily for them "the kye had not come hame," and the shed was empty. They got into the farthest corner of it; for it was all open towards the river; and the rain pattered on the roof as if it would break it.

Thus driven together, was it wonderful that soon her hand was in his, and that, as they purred together, and murmured

soft nothings, she was once surprised into returning the soft pressure which he gave it so often?

The plump declaration she had fled from, and now seemed deliciously resigned to, did not actually come. But he did what she valued more, he resumed his confidences: told her he had vices: was fond of gambling. Excused it on the score of his loss by his brother. Said he hoped soon to hear good news from Canada. Didn't despair. Was happy now in spite of all. Had been happy ever since he had met *her*. What declaration was needed? The understanding was complete. Neither doubted the other's love; and Zoe would have thought herself a faithless, wicked girl, if, after this, she had gone and accepted any other man.

But presently she had a misgiving, and looked at her watch. Yes, it wanted but one hour to dinner. Now her brother was rather a Tartar about punctuality at dinner. She felt she was already in danger of censure for her long *tête-à-tête* with Severne, though the rain was the culprit. She could not afford to draw every eye upon her by being late for dinner along with him.

She told Severne they must go home now, rain or no rain; and she walked resolutely out into the weather.

Severne did not like it at all, but he was wise enough to deplore it only on her account; and indeed her light alpaca was soon drenched, and began to cling to her.

But the spirited girl only laughed at his condolences as she hurried on. "Why, it is only warm water," said she: "this is no more than a bath in the summer sea. Bathing is getting wet through in blue flannel. Well, I am bathing in blue alpaca."

"But it will ruin your dress."

"My dress! why, it is as old as the hills. When I get home I'll give it to Rosa—ready washed, ha! ha!"

The rain pelted and poured, and long before they reached the inn, Zoe's dress had become an external cuticle, an alpaca skin.

But innocence is sometimes very bold. She did not care a bit: and, to tell the truth, she had little need to care. Beauty so positive as hers is indomitable. The petty accidents that are the terrors of homely charms, seem to enhance Queen Beauty. Dishevelled hair adorns it. Close-bound hair adorns it. Simplicity adorns it. Diamonds adorn it. Everything seems to adorn it, because the truth is, it adorns

everything. And so Zoe, drenched with rain, and her dress a bathing-gown, was only a Greek goddess tinted blue, her bust and shoulders and her moulded figure covered, yet revealed. What was she to an artist's eye? Just the Townley Venus with her sculptor's cunning draperies, and Juno's gait.

"Et vera incessa patuit Dea."

When she got to the hotel she held up her finger to Severne with a pretty peremptoriness. She had shown him so much tenderness, she felt she had a right to order him now. "I must beg of you," said she, "to go straight to your room and dress very quickly, and present yourself to Harrington five minutes before dinner at least."

"I will obey," said he obsequiously.

That pleased her, and she kissed her hand to him and scudded to her own room.

At sight of the blazing fire and provident preparations, she started and said aloud, "Oh, how nice of them!" and all dripping as she was, she stood there with her young heart in a double glow.

Such a nature as hers has too little egotism and low-bred vanity to undervalue worthy love. The infinite heart of a Zoe Vizard can love but one with passion, yet ever so many more with warm and tender affection.

She gave aunt Maitland credit for this provident affection. It was out of the sprightly Fanny's line; and she said to herself, "Dear old thing! there, I thought she was bottling up a lecture for me, and all the time her real anxiety was lest I should be wet through." Thereupon she settled in her mind to begin loving aunt Maitland from that hour. She did not ring for her maid till she was nearly dressed; and when Rosa came and exclaimed at the condition of her cast-off robes, she laughed, and told her it was nothing—the Maine was nice and warm—pretending she had been in it. She ordered her to dry the dress and iron it.

"Why, la, miss; you'll never wear it again, to be sure?" said Rosa demurely.

"I don't know," said the young lady archly; "but I mean to take great care of it," and burst out laughing like a peal of silver bells, because she was in high spirits and saw what Rosa would be at.

Give away the gown she had been wooed and wet through

in—no, thank you! Such gowns as these be landmarks, my masters.

Vizard, unconscious of her arrival, was walking up and down the room, fidgeting more and more, when in came Zoe, dressed high in black silk and white lace, looking ever so cosy, and blooming like a rose.

"What!" said he; "in and dressed." He took her by the shoulders, and gave her a great kiss. "You young monkey," said he, "I was afraid you were washed away."

Zoe suggested that would only have been a woman obliterated.

"That is true," said he, with an air of hearty conviction. "I forgot that."

He then inquired if she had had a nice walk.

"Oh, beautiful; imprisoned half the time in a cow-shed, and then drenched. But I'll have a nice walk with you, dear, up and down the room."

"Come on, then."

She put her right hand on his left shoulder and gave him her left hand, and they walked up and down the room, Zoe beaming with happiness and affection for everybody, and walking at a graceful bend.

Severne came in, dressed and perfect as though just taken out of a band-box. He sat down at a little table and read a little journal unobtrusively. It was his cue to divest his late *tête-à-tête* of public importance.

Then came dinner, and two of the party absent. Vizard heard their voices going like mill-clacks at this sacred hour, and summoned them rather roughly, as stated above. His back was to Zoe, and she rubbed her hands gaily to Severne, and sent him a flying whisper, "Oh what fun! we are the culprits, and they are the ones scolded."

Dinner waited ten minutes and then the defaulters appeared. Nothing was said, but Vizard looked rather glum; and aunt Maitland cast a vicious look at Severne and Zoe: they had made a forced march and outflanked her. She sat down and bided her time, like a fowler waiting till the ducks come within shot.

But the conversation was commonplace, inconsecutive, shifty and vague, and it was two hours before anything came within shot: all this time not a soul suspected the ambushed fowler.

At last, Vizard having thrown out one of his hints that the fair sex are imperfect, Fanny, being under the influence of

Miss Maitland's revelations, ventured to suggest that they had no more faults than men, and *certainly* were not more deceitful.

"Indeed?" said Vizard. "Not—more—*deceitful!* Do you speak from experience?"

"Oh no, no," said Fanny, getting rather frightened. "I only think so, somehow."

"Well, but you must have a reason. May I respectfully inquire whether more men have jilted you than you have jilted?"

"You may inquire as respectfully as you like; but I shan't tell you."

"That is right, Miss Dover," said Severne: "don't you put up with his nonsense. He knows nothing about it: women are angels compared with men. The wonder is how they can waste so much truth, and constancy, and beauty, upon the foul sex. To my mind, there is only one thing we beat you in; we do stick by each other rather better than you do. You are truer to us; we are a little truer to each other."

"Not a little," suggested Vizard drily.

"For my part," said Zoe, blushing pink at her boldness in advancing an opinion on so large a matter, "I think these comparisons are rather narrow-minded: what have *we* to do with bad people, male or female? A good man is good, and a good woman is good: still I do think that women have greater hearts to love, and men, perhaps, greater hearts for friendship:" then, blushing roseate, "even in the short time we have been here we have seen two gentlemen give up pleasure for self-denying friendship. Lord Uxmoor gave us all up for a sick friend. Mr. Severne did more, perhaps; for he lost that divine singer;—you will never hear her now, Mr. Severne."

The Maitland gun went off. "A sick friend!—Mr. Severne?—ha! ha! ha! You silly girl, he has got no sick friend. He was at the gaming-table. That was his sick friend."

It was an effective discharge. It winged a duck or two. It killed, as follows: the tranquillity—the good humour—and the content of the little party.

Severne started, and stared, and lost colour, and then cast at Vizard a venomous look never seen on his face before; for he naturally concluded that Vizard had betrayed him.

Zoe was amazed, looked instantly at Severne, saw it was true, and turned pale at his evident discomfiture. Her lover had been guilty of deceit—mean and rather heartless deceit.

Even Fanny winced at the point-blank denunciation of a young man who was himself polite to everybody. She would have done it in a very different way—insinuations, innuendo, &c.

"They have found you out, old fellow," said Vizard, merrily; "but you need not look as if you had robbed a church. Hang it all! a fellow has a right to gamble if he chooses. Anyway he paid for his whistle; for he lost three hundred pounds."

"Three hundred pounds!" cried the terrible old maid. "Where ever did he get them to lose?"

Severne divined that he had nothing to gain by fiction here, so he said sullenly, "I got them from Vizard; but I gave him value for them."

"You need not publish our private transactions, Ned," said Vizard. "Miss Maitland, this is really not in your department."

"Oh yes, it is," said she; "and so you'll find."

This pertinacity looked like defiance. Vizard rose from his chair, bowed ironically, with the air of a man not disposed for a hot argument. "In that case—with permission—I'll withdraw to my veranda, and, in that—(he struck a light)—peaceful—(here he took a suck)—shade——"

"You will meditate on the charms of Ina Klosking."

Vizard received this poisoned arrow in the small of the back as he was sauntering out. He turned swiftly as if a man had struck him, and for a single moment he looked downright terrible, and wonderfully unlike the easy-going Harrington Vizard. But he soon recovered himself. "What! you listen, do you?" said he; and turned contemptuously on his heel without another word.

There was an uneasy, chilling pause. Miss Maitland would have given something to withdraw her last shot. Fanny was very uncomfortable and fixed her eyes on the table. Zoe, deeply shocked at Severne's deceit, was now amazed and puzzled about her brother. "Ina Klosking!" inquired she; "who is that?"

"Ask Mr. Severne," said Miss Maitland sturdily.

Now Mr. Severne was sitting silent, but with restless eyes meditating how he should get over that figment of his about the sick friend.

Zoe turned round on him, fixed her glorious eyes full upon his face, and said rather imperiously, "Mr. Severne, who is Ina Klosking?"

Mr. Severne looked up blankly in her face and said nothing.

She coloured at not being answered, and repeated her question (all this time Fanny's eyes were fixed on the young man even more keenly than Zoe's), "Who—and what—is Ina Klosking?"

"She is a public singer."

"Do you know her?"

"Yes; I heard her sing at Vienna."

"Yes, yes; but do you know her to speak to?"

He considered half a moment, and then said he had not that honour. "But," said he, rather hurriedly, "somebody or other told me she had come out at the opera here and made a hit."

"What, in Siebel?"

"I don't know: but I saw large bills out with her name. She made her *début* in Gounod's 'Faust.'"

"It is *my* Siebel!" cried Zoe rapturously. "Why, aunt, no wonder Harrington admires her. For my part, I adore her."

"*You*, child! That is quite a different matter."

"No, it is not. He is like me; he has only seen her once, as I have, and on the stage."

"Fiddle-de-dee. I tell you he is in love with her, over head and ears; he is wonderfully inflammable for a woman-hater. Ask Mr. Severne; he knows."

"Mr. Severne, is my brother in love with that lady?"

Severne's turn had come; that able young man saw his chance, and did as good a bit of acting as ever was extemporised even by an Italian mime.

"Miss Vizard," said he, fixing his hazel eyes on her for the first time, in a way that made her feel his power, "what passed in confidence between two friends ought to be sacred. Don't—you—think so?" (The girl quivered, remembering the secret he had confessed to her.) "Miss Maitland has done your brother and me the honour to listen to our secrets. She shall repeat them, if she thinks it delicate; but I shall not without Vizard's consent; and, more than that, the conversation seems to me to be taking the turn of casting blame, and ridicule, and I don't know what, on the best-hearted, kindest-hearted, truest-hearted, noblest

and manliest man I know. I decline to take any further share in it."

With these last words in his mouth, he stuck his hands defiantly into his pockets, and stalked out into the veranda, looking every inch a man.

Zoe folded her arms and gazed after him with undisguised admiration. How well everything he did became him! his firing up—his brusquerie—the very movements of his body, all so piquant, charming, and unwomanly. As he vanished from her admiring eyes, she turned, with flaming cheeks, on Miss Maitland and said, "Well, aunt, you have driven them both out at the window; now, say something pretty to Fanny and me, and drive us out at the door."

Miss Maitland hung her head; she saw she had them all against her but Fanny, and Fanny was a trimmer. She said sorrowfully, "No, Zoe. I feel how unattractive I have made the room. I have driven away the gods of your idolatry—they are only idols of clay; but that you can't believe. I will banish nobody else, except a cross-grained but respectable old woman, who is too experienced, and too much soured by it, to please young people when things are going wrong."

With this she took her bed-candle and retired.

Zoe had an inward struggle. As Miss Maitland opened her bedroom door, she called to her, "Aunt! one word. Was it you that ordered the fire in my bedroom?"

Now, if she had received the answer she expected, she meant to say, "Then please let me forget everything else you have said or done to-day." But Miss Maitland stared a little, and said, "Fire in your bedroom; no."

"Oh!—then I have nothing to thank you for this day," said Zoe, with all the hardness of youth; though, as a general rule, she had not her share of it.

The old lady winced visibly, but she made a creditable answer. "Then, my dear, you shall have my prayers this night; and it does not matter much whether you thank me for them or not."

As she disappeared Zoe flung herself wearily on a couch and very soon began to cry. Fanny ran to her, and nestled close to her, and the two had a rock together, Zoe crying and Fanny coaxing and comforting.

"Ah!" sighed Zoe; "this was the happiest day of my life; and see how it ends! Quarrelling and deceit; the one I hate, the other I despise. No, never again, until I

have said my prayers, and am just going to sleep, will I cry, 'O giorne felice!' as I did this afternoon, when the rain was pouring on me; but my heart was all in a glow."

These pretty little lamentations of youth were interrupted by Mr. Severne slipping away from his friend, to try and recover lost ground.

He was coolly received by Zoe; then he looked dismayed, but affected not to understand; then Zoe pinched Fanny, which meant, "I don't choose to put him on his defence; but I am dying to hear if he has anything to say." Thereupon Fanny obeyed that significant pinch, and said, "Mr. Severne, my cousin is not a woman of the world; she is a country girl, with old-fashioned romantic notions that a man should be above telling fibs; I have known her longer than you, and I see she can't understand your passing off the gambling-table for a sick friend."

"Why, I never did," said he, as bold as brass.

"Mr. Severne!"

"Miss Dover! My sick friend was at 'The Golden Star,' that's a small hotel in a different direction from the Kursaal. I was there from seven o'clock till nine. You ask the waiter if you don't believe me."

Fanny giggled at this inadvertent speech; but Zoe's feelings were too deeply engaged to shoot fun flying. "Fanny," cried she eagerly, "I heard him tell the coachman to drive him to that very place, 'The Golden Star.'"

"Really?" said Fanny mystified.

"Indeed I did, dear. I remember 'The Golden Star' distinctly."

"Ladies, I was there till nine o'clock. Then I started for the theatre. Unfortunately the theatre is attached to the Kursaal. I thought I would just look in for a few minutes. In fact I don't think I was there half an hour. But Miss Maitland is quite right in one thing. I lost more than two hundred pounds, all through playing on a false system. Of course I know I had no business to go there at all, when I might have been by your side."

"And heard La Klosking"

"It was devilish bad taste, and you may well be surprised and offended."

"No, no; not at that," said Zoe.

"But hang it all! don't make a fellow worse than he is. Why should I invent a sick friend? I suppose I have a right to go to the Kursaal if I choose. At any rate I mean to go

to-morrow afternoon and win a pot of money. Hinder me who can."

Zoe beamed with pleasure. "That spiteful old woman! I am ashamed of myself. Of course you *have*. It becomes a man to say *je veux;* and it becomes a woman to yield. Forgive our unworthy doubts. We will all go to the Kursaal to-morrow."

The reconciliation was complete; and to add to Zoe's happiness, she made a little discovery. Rosa came in to see if she wanted anything. That, you must know, was Rosa's way of saying, "It is very late. I'm tired; so the sooner *you* go to bed the better." And Zoe was by nature so considerate, that she often went to bed more for Rosa's convenience than her own inclination.

But this time she said sharply, "Yes, I do. I want to know who had my fire lighted for me in the middle of summer."

"Why, squire, to be sure," said Rosa.

"What! *my* brother?"

"Yes, miss; and seen to it all hisself: leastways I found the things properly muddled. 'Twas to be seen a man had been at 'em."

Rosa retired, leaving Zoe's face a picture.

Just then Vizard put his head cautiously in at the window and said, in a comic whisper, "Is she gone?"

"Yes, she is gone," cried Zoe, "and you are wanted in her place." She ran to meet him. "Who ordered a fire in my room and muddled all my things?" said she severely.

"I did. What of that?"

"Oh, nothing; only now I know who is my friend. Young people, here's a lesson for you. When a lady is out in the rain, don't prepare a lecture for her, like Aunt Maitland, but light her a fire, like this dear old duck of a woman-hating impostor. Kiss me!" (violently.)

"There—pest."

"That is not enough, nor half. There, and there, and there, and there, and there, and there."

"Now, look here, my young friend," said Vizard, holding her lovely head by both ears; "you are exciting yourself about nothing, and that will end in one of your headaches. So just take your candle and go to bed, like a good little girl."

"Must I? Well, then, I will. Good-bye, tyrant dear. Oh, how I love you! Come, Fanny."

She gave her hand shyly to Severne, and soon they were both in Zoe's room.

Rosa was dismissed, and they had their chat; but it was nearly all on one side. Fanny had plenty to say, but did not say it. She had not the heart to cloud that beaming face again so soon; she temporised. Zoe pressed her with questions too; but she slurred things. Zoe asked her why Miss Maitland was so bitter against poor Mr. Severne. Fanny said, in an off-hand way, "Oh, it is only on your account she objects to him."

"And what are her objections?"

"Oh, only grammatical ones, dear. She says his *antecedents* are obscure, and his *relatives* unknown: ha, ha, ha!" Fanny laughed, but Zoe did not see the fun. Then Fanny stroked her down.

"Never mind that old woman. I shall interfere properly if I see you in danger: it was monstrous her making an *esclandre* at the very dinner-table, and spoiling your happy day."

"But she hasn't," cried Zoe eagerly. "'All's well that ends well.' I am happy—oh, so happy! You love me. Harrington loves me. *He* loves me. What more can any woman ask for than to be *amata bene?*"

This was the last word between Zoe and Fanny upon St. Brooch's day.

As Fanny went to her own room the vigilant Maitland opened her door that looked upon the corridor and beckoned her in. "Well," said she, "did you speak to Zoe?"

"Just a word before dinner. Aunt, she came in wet to the skin, and in higher spirits than Rosa ever knew her."

Aunt groaned.

"And what do you think! Her spoiled dress, she ordered it to be ironed and put by. *It is a case.*"

Next day they all met at a late breakfast, and good-humour was the order of the day.

This encouraged Zoe to throw out a feeler about the gambling-tables. Then Fanny said it must be nice to gamble, because it was so naughty. "In a long experience," said Miss Dover, with a sigh, "I have found that whatever is nice is naughty, and whatever is naughty is nice."

"There's a short code of morals," observed Vizard, "for the use of seminaries. Now let us hear Severne; he knows all the defences of gambling lunacy has discovered."

Severne, thus appealed to, said play was like other things, bad only when carried to excess. "At Homburg, where the play is fair, what harm can there be in devoting two or three hours of a long day to *trente et quarante?* The play exercises memory, judgment, *sang froid*, and other good qualities of the mind; above all, it is on the square. Now, buying and selling shares without delivery—bulling, and bearing, and rigging, and Stock Exchange speculations in general—are just as much gambling; but with cards all marked, and dice loaded—and a fair player has no chance. The world," said this youthful philosopher, "is taken in by words. The truth is, that gambling with cards is fair, and gambling without cards a swindle."

"He is hard upon the City," said Vizard; "but no matter. Proceed, young man. Develop your code of morals for the amusement of mankind, while duller spirits inflict instruction."

"You have got my opinion," said Severne; "oblige us with yours."

"No; mine would not be popular just now: I reserve it till we are there, and can see the lunatics at work."

"Oh, then we are to go!" cried Fanny. "Oh, be joyful!"

"That depends on Miss Maitland. It is not in my department."

Instantly four bright eyes were turned piteously on the awful Maitland.

"Oh, aunt," said Zoe pleadingly, "*do* you think there would be any great harm in our—just for once in a way?"

"My dear," said Miss Maitland solemnly, "I cannot say that I approve of public gambling in general. But at Homburg the company is select. I have seen a German prince, a Russian prince, and two English countesses, the very *élite* of London society, seated at the same table in the Kursaal. I think, therefore, there can be no harm in your going, under the conduct of older persons—myself, for example, and your brother."

"Code three," suggested Vizard—"the chaperonian code."

"And a very good one, too," said Zoe. "But, aunt, must we look on, or may we play, just a little, little?"

"My dear, there can be no great harm in playing a little,

in *good company*—if you play with your own money." She must have one dig at Severne.

"I shan't play very deep, then," said Fanny; "for I have got no money hardly."

Vizard came to the front like a man. "No more should I," said he, "but for Herries & Co. As it is, I am a Crœsus, and I shall stand £100, which you three ladies must divide; and between you, no doubt, you will break the bank."

Acclamations greeted this piece of misogyny. When they had subsided, Severne was called on to explain the game, and show the young ladies how to win a fortune with £33, 6s. 8d.

The table was partly cleared, two packs of cards sent for, and the professor lectured. "This," said he, "is the cream of the game. Six packs are properly shuffled and properly cut; the players put their money on black or red, which is the main event, and is settled thus: The dealer deals the cards in two rows. He deals the *first* row for black, and stops the moment the cards pass thirty. That deal determines how near *noir* can get to thirty-one."

Severne then dealt for *noir*, and the cards came as follows:—

Queen of Hearts—four of Clubs—ten of Spades—nine of Diamonds: total, 33.

He then dealt for red:—

Knave of Clubs—Ace of Diamonds—two of Spades—King of Spades—nine of Hearts: total, 32.

"Red wins, because the cards dealt for red come nearest thirty-one. Besides that," said he, "you can bet on the colour or against it. The actual colour of the first card the player turns up on the black line must be black or red. Whichever happens to be it is called 'the colour.' Say it is red, then, if the black line of cards wins, colour loses. Now I will deal again for both events."

"I deal for *noir*."

"Nine of Diamonds. Red, then, is the actual colour turned up on the black line. Do you bet for it, or against it?"

"I bet for it," cried Zoe. "It's my favourite colour."

"And what do you say on the main event?"

"Oh, red on that too."

"Very good. I go on dealing for *noir*. Queen of Diamonds, three of Spades, Knave of Hearts—thirty-two. That looks ugly for your two events, black coming so near as thirty-two. Now for red. Four of Hearts, Knave of Spades, seven of

Diamonds. Queen of Clubs—thirty-one, by Jove! *Rouge gagne et couleur.* There is nothing like courage. You have won both events."

"Oh, what a nice game!" cried Zoe.

He then continued to deal, and they all betted on the main event and the colour, staking fabulous sums, till at last both numbers came up thirty-one.

Thereupon Severne informed them that half the stakes belonged to him. That was the trifling advantage accorded to the bank.

"Which trifling advantage," said Vizard, "has enriched the man-eating company and their prince, and built the Kursaal, and will clean you all out if you play long enough."

"That," said Severne, "I deny; it is more than balanced by the right the players have of doubling till they gain, and by the maturity of the chances. I will explain this to the ladies: you see experience proves that neither red nor black can come up more than nine times running. When, therefore, either colour has come up four times, you can put a moderate stake on the other colour, and double on it till it *must* come by the laws of nature. Say red has turned four times. You put a napoleon on black; red gains. You lose a napoleon. You don't remove it, but double on it. The chances are now five to one you gain: but if you lose, you double on the same, and when you have got to sixteen napoleons the colour must change; uniformity has reached its physical limit. That is called the maturity of the chances. Begin as unluckily as possible with five francs, and lose. If you have to double eight times before you win it only comes to 1280 francs. Given, therefore, a man to whom fifty napoleons are no more than five francs to us, he can never lose if he doubles, like a Trojan, till the chances are mature. This is called 'the Martingale:' but observe, it only secures against loss. Heavy gains are made by doubling judiciously on the *winning* colour, or by simply betting on short runs of it. When red comes up, back red, and double twice on it. Thus you profit by the remarkable and observed fact that the colours do not, as a rule, alternate, but reach ultimate equality by avoiding alternation, and making short runs, with occasional long runs; the latter are rare, and must be watched with a view to the balancing run of the other colour. This is my system."

"And you really think you have invented it?" asked Vizard.

"I am not so conceited. My system was communicated to me, in the Kursaal itself—by an old gentleman."

"*An* old gentleman, or *the?*"

"Oh, Harrington!" cried Zoe; "fie!"

"My wit is appreciated at its value. Proceed, Ned."

Severne told him, a little defiantly, it was an old gentleman, with a noble head, a silvery beard, and the most benevolent countenance he ever saw.

"Curious place for his reverence to be in," hazarded Vizard.

"He saw me betting, first on the black, then on the red, till I was cleaned out, and then he beckoned me."

"Not a man of premature advice, though."

"He told me he had observed my play. I had been relying on the alternations of the colours, which alternation chance persistently avoids, and arrives at equality by runs. He then gave me a better system."

"And having expounded his system he illustrated it. Tell the truth now; he sat down and lost the coat off his back. It followed his family acres."

"You are quite wrong again. He never plays. He has heart disease, and his physician has forbidden him all excitement."

"His nation?"

"Humph! French."

"Ah! the nation that produced '*Le philosophe sans le savoir.*' And now it has added, '*Le philosophe sans le vouloir,*' and you have stumbled on him. What a life for an aged man! *Fortunatus ille senex qui ludicola vivit.* Tantalus handcuffed, and glowering over a gambling-table; a hell in a hell."

"Oh, Harrington!"

"Exclamations not allowed in sober argument, Zoe. Come, Ned, it is not heart disease, it is purse disease. Just do me a favour. Here are five sovereigns; give those to the old beggar and let him risk them."

"I could hardly take such a liberty with an old gentleman of his age and appearance—a man of honour too, and high sentiments. Why, I'd bet seven to four he is one of Napoleon's old soldiers."

The ladies sided unanimously with Severne. "What! offer a *vieux de l'Empire* five pounds? Oh fie."

"Fiddle-de-dee!" said the indomitable Vizard. "Besides, Ned will do it with his usual grace. He will approach the

son of Mars with that feigned humility which sits so well on youth, and ask him as a personal favour to invest five pounds for *him* at *rouge et noir*. The old soldier will stiffen into double dignity at first, then give him a low wink, and end by sitting down and gambling. He will be cautious at starting, as one who opens trenches for the siege of Mammon; but soon the veteran will get heated and give battle; he will fancy himself at Jena, since the croupiers are Prussians. If he loses you cut him dead, being a humdrum Englishman; and if he wins he cuts you and pockets the cash, being a Frenchman that talks sentiment."

This sally provoked a laugh, in which Severne joined, and said, "Really, for a landed proprietor, you know a thing or two." He consented at last, with some reluctance, to take the money; and none of the persons present doubted that he would execute the commission with a grace and delicacy all his own. Nevertheless, to run forward a little with the narrative, I must tell you that he never did hand that five pounds to the venerable sire; a little thing prevented him—the old man wasn't born yet.

"And now," said Vizard, "it is our last day in Homburg. You are all going to gratify your mania—lunacy is contagious; suppose I gratify mine."

"Do, dear," said Zoe; "and what is it?"

"I like your asking that, when it was publicly announced last night, and I fled discomfited to my balcony, and in my confusion lighted a cigar. My mania is—the Klosking."

"That is not a mania; it is good taste. She is admirable."

"Yes, in an opera; but I want to know how she looks and talks in a room, and that is insane of me."

"Then so you *shall*, insane or not. I will call on her this morning and take you in my hand."

"What an ample palm; and what juvenile audacity! Zoe, you take my breath away."

"No audacity at all. I am sure of my welcome. How often must I tell you that we have mesmerised each other, that lady and I, and are only waiting an opportunity to rush into each other's arms! It began with her singling me out at the opera. But I daresay that was owing, *at first*, only to my being in full dress."

"No, no; to your being, like Agamemnon, a head taller than all the other Greeks."

"Harrington! I am not a Greek. I am a thorough English girl at heart, though I *am* as black as a coal."

"No apology needed in our present frame—you are all the more like the ace of spades."

"Do you want me to take you to the Klosking, sir? Then you had better not make fun of me. I tell you she sang to *me*, and smiled on *me*, and curtsied to *me;* and now you have put it into my head, I mean to call upon her; and I will take you with me. What I shall do, I shall send in my card. I shall be admitted, and you will wait outside. As soon as she sees me, she will run to me with both hands out, and say, in excellent *French*, '*How*, Mademoiselle! you have deigned to remember me, and to honour me with a visit.' Then I shall say, in school-French, 'Yes, Madame; excuse the intrusion; but I was so charmed with your performance. We leave Homburg to-morrow; and as, unfortunately for myself, I cannot have the pleasure of seeing you again upon the stage——' then I shall stop for her to interrupt me. Then she will interrupt me and say charming things, as only foreigners can; and then I shall say, still in school-French, 'Madame, I am not alone. I have my brother with me. He adores music, and was as fascinated with your Siebel as myself. May I present him?' Then she will say 'Oh yes, by all means:' and I shall introduce you. Then you can make love to her. That will be droll. Fanny, I'll tell you every word he says."

"Make love to her!" cried Vizard. "Is this your estimate of a brother's motives? My object in visiting this lady is, not to feed my mania, but to cure it. I have seen her on the stage, looking like the incarnation of a poet's dream. I am *extasié* with her. Now let me catch her *en déshabillé*, with her porter on one side and her lover on the other: and so to Barfordshire, relieved of a fatal illusion."

"If that is your view I'll go by myself; for I know she is a noble woman, and as much a lady off the stage as on it. But suppose she should talk that dreadful guttural German, with its 'ochs' and its 'achs,' then, where shall we all be? We must ask Mr. Severne to go with us."

"A good idea; no—a vile one. He is abominably handsome, and has the gift of the gab—in German and other languages. He is sure to cut me out, the villain! Lock him up, somebody, till we come back."

"Now, Harrington, don't be absurd. He must and shall

be of the party. I have my reasons. Mr. Severne," said she, turning on him with a blush and a divine smile, "you will oblige me, I am sure."

Severne's face turned as blank as a doll's, and he said nothing one way or other.

It was settled that they should all meet at the Kursaal at four, to dine and play. But Zoe and her party would go on ahead by the one o'clock train; and so she retired to put on her bonnet — a technical expression which implies a good deal.

Fanny went with her, and as events more exciting than the usual routine of their young lives were ahead, their tongues went a rare pace. But the only thing worth presenting to the reader came at the end, after the said business of the toilet had been despatched.

Zoe said, "I must go now, or I shall keep them waiting."

"Only one, dear," said Fanny drily.

"Why only one?"

"Mr. Severne will not go."

"That he will: I made a point of it."

"You did, dear; but still he will not go."

There was something in this and in Fanny's tone that startled Zoe and puzzled her sorely. She turned round upon her, with flashing eye, and said, "No mysteries, please, dear. Why won't he go with me wherever I ask him to go? or, rather, what makes you think he won't?"

Said Fanny thoughtfully, "I could not tell you, all in a moment, why I feel so positive. One puts little things together that are nothing apart: one observes faces; I do, at least. You don't seem to me to be so quick at that as most girls. But, Zoe, dear, you know very well one often knows a thing for certain, yet one doesn't know exactly what makes one know it."

Now Zoe's *amour propre* was wounded by Fanny's suggestion that Severne would not go to Homburg, or indeed to the world's end with her; so she drew herself up in her grand way, and folded her arms, and said a little haughtily, "Then tell me what is it you know about *him* and me, without knowing how on earth you know it."

The supercilious tone and grand manner nettled Fanny, and it wasn't "brooch-day:" she stood up to her lofty cousin like a little gamecock. "I know this," said she, with heightened cheek and flashing eyes, and a voice of steel;

"you will never get Mr. Edward Severne into one room with Zoe Vizard and Ina Klosking."

Zoe Vizard turned very pale, but her eyes flashed defiance on her friend.

"That I'll know," said she in a deep voice, with a little gasp, but a world of pride and resolution.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ladies went down together and found Vizard ready. Mr. Severne was not in the room. Zoe inquired after him.

"Gone to get a sunshade," said Vizard.

"There!" said Zoe to Fanny in a triumphant whisper. "What is that for but to go with us?"

Fanny made no reply.

They waited some time for Severne and his sunshade.

At last Vizard looked at his watch and said they had only five minutes to spare. "Come down and look after him. He *must* be somewhere about."

They went down and looked for him all over the Zeil. He was not to be seen. At last Vizard took out his watch and said, "It is some misunderstanding: we can't wait any longer."

So he and Zoe went to the train. Neither said much on the way to Homburg; for they were both brooding. Vizard's good sense and right feeling were beginning to sting him a little for calling on the Klosking at all, and a great deal for using the enthusiasm of an inexperienced girl to obtain an introduction to a public singer. He sat moody in his corner taking himself to task. Zoe's thoughts ran in quite another channel; but she was no easier in her mind. It really seemed as if Severne had given her the slip. Probably he would explain his conduct; but then that Fanny should foretell he would avoid her company, rather than call on Mademoiselle Klosking, and that Fanny should be right, this made the thing serious, and galled Zoe to the quick. She was angry with Fanny for prophesying truly; she was rather angry with Severne for not

coming, and more angry with him for making good Fanny's prediction.

Zoe Vizard was a good girl, and a generous girl; but she was not a humble girl: she had a great deal of pride and her share of vanity, and here both were galled. Besides that, it seemed to her most strange and disheartening that Fanny, who did not love Severne, should be able to foretell his conduct better than she, who did love him; such foresight looked like greater insight. All this humiliated and also puzzled her strangely; and so she sat brooding as deeply as her brother.

As for Vizard, by the time they got to Homburg he had made up his mind. As they got out of the train he said, "Look here; I am ashamed of myself. I have a right to play the fool, alone; but I have no business to drag my sister into it. We will go somewhere else. There are lots of things to see. I give up the Klosking."

Zoe stared at him a moment, and then answered, with cold decision, "No, dear; you must allow me to call on her now I am here. She won't bite *me*."

"Well, but it is a strange thing to do."

"What does that matter? We are abroad."

"Come, Zoe, I am much obliged to you; but give it up."

"No, dear."

Harrington smiled at her pretty peremptoriness and misunderstood it. "This is carrying sisterly love a long way," said he. "I must try and rise to your level. I won't go with you."

"Then I shall go alone."

"What if I forbid you, Miss?"

She tapped him on the cheek with her fingers. "Don't affect the tyrant, dear; you can't manage it. Fanny said something that has mortified me. I shall go; you can do as you like. But—stop; where does she live?"

"Suppose I decline to tell you? I am seized with a virtuous fit—a regular paroxysm."

"Then I shall go to the opera and inquire. But" (coaxingly) "you will tell me, dear."

"There," said Harrington, "you wicked, tempting girl, my sham virtue has oozed away and my real mania triumphs. She lives at 'The Golden Star.' I was weak enough to send Harris in last night to learn."

Zoe smiled.

He hailed a conveyance; and they started at once for "The Golden Star."

"Zoe," said Harrington gravely, "something tells me I am going to meet my fate."

"All the better," said Zoe; "I wish you to meet your fate. My love for my brother is not selfish. I am sure she is a good woman. Perhaps I may find out something."

"About what?"

"Oh, never mind."

CHAPTER IX

All this time Ina Klosking was rehearsing at the theatre, quite unconscious of the impending visit. A royal personage had commanded 'Il Barbiere,' the part of Rosina to be restored to the original key. It was written for a contralto, but transposed by the influence of Grisi.

Having no performance that night they began to rehearse rather later than usual, and did not leave off till a quarter to four o'clock. Ina, who suffered a good deal at rehearsals from the inaccuracy and apathy of the people, went home fagged and with her throat parched.

She ordered a cutlet, with potato chips, and lay down on the sofa. While she was reposing came Joseph Ashmead to cheer her, with good photographs of her taken the day before. She smiled gratefully at his zeal. He also reminded her that he had orders to take her to the Kursaal: he said the tables would be well filled from five o'clock till quite late, there being no other entertainment on foot that evening.

Ina thanked him, and said she would not miss going on any account; but she was rather fatigued and faint.

"Oh, I'll wait for you as long as you like," said Ashmead kindly.

"No, my good comrade," said Ina. "I will ask you to go to the manager and get me a little money, and then to the Kursaal and secure me a place at the table in the largest room. There I will join you. If *he* is not there—and I am not so mad as to think he will be there—I shall risk a few pieces myself to be nearer him in mind."

This amazed Ashmead; it was so unlike her. "You are

joking," said he. "Why, if you lose five napoleons at play it will be your death; you will grizzle so."

"Yes; but I shall not lose. I am too unlucky in love to lose at cards. I mean to play this afternoon; and never again in all my life. Sir, I am resolved."

"Oh, if you are resolved there is no more to be said. I won't run my head against a brick wall."

Ina, being half a foreigner, thought this rather brusque. She looked at him askant and said quietly, "Others besides me can be stubborn, and get their own way while speaking the language of submission. Not I invented volition."

With this flea in his ear the faithful Joseph went off chuckling, and obtained an advance from the manager, and then proceeded to the principal gaming-table, and, after waiting some time, secured a chair, which he kept for his chief.

An hour went by; an hour and a half. He was obliged, for very shame, to bet. This he did, five francs at a time; and his risk was so small, and his luck so even, that by degrees he was drawn into conversation with his neighbour, a young swell who was watching the run of the colours, and betting in silver, and pricking a card, preparatory to going in for a great *coup*. Meantime he favoured Mr. Ashmead with his theory of chances; and Ashmead listened very politely to every word, because he was rather proud of the other's notice—he was so handsome, well dressed, and well spoken.

Meantime Ina Klosking snatched a few minutes' sleep, as most artists can in the afternoon, and was awakened by the servant bringing in her frugal repast, a cutlet and a pint of Bordeaux.

On her plate he brought her a large card, on which was printed "Miss Zoe Vizard." This led to inquiries, and he told her a lady of superlative beauty had called and left that card. Ina asked for a description.

"Ah, madame," said Karl, "do not expect details from me. I was too dazzled and struck by lightning to make an inventory of her charms."

"At least you can tell me was she dark or fair."

"Madame, she was dark as night; but glorious as the sun. Her earthly abode is the 'Russie,' at Frankfort; blest hotel!"

"Did she tell you so?"

"Indirectly. She wrote on the card with the smallest

pencil I have hitherto witnessed: the letters are faint, the pencil being inferior to the case, which was golden. Nevertheless, as one is naturally curious to learn whence a bright vision has emerged, I permitted myself to decipher."

"Your curiosity was natural," said Ina drily. "I will detain you with no more questions."

She put the card carefully away, and ate her modest repast. Then she made her afternoon toilet, and walked slowly and pensively to the Kursaal.

Nothing there was new to her, except to be going to the table without the man on whom it was her misfortune to have wasted her heart of gold.

I think, therefore, it would be better for me to enter the place in company with our novices; and indeed we must, or we shall derange the true order of time and sequence of incidents: for, please observe, all the English ladies of our story met at the Kursaal while Ina was reposing on her sofa.

The first comers were Zoe and Harrington. They entered the noble hall, inscribed their names, and by that simple ceremony were members of a club, compared with which the greatest clubs in London are petty things: a club with spacious dining-rooms, ball-rooms, concert-rooms, gambling-rooms, theatre, and delicious gardens. The building that combined so many rich treats was colossal in size, and glorious with rich colours and gold laid on with oriental profusion, and sometimes with oriental taste.

Harrington took his sister through the drawing-rooms first; and she admired the unusual loftiness of the rooms, the blaze of white and gold, and of celadon green and gold, and the great Russian lustres, and the mighty mirrors. But when they got to the dining-room she was enchanted. That lofty and magnificent *salon*, with its daring mixture of red and black, and green and blue, all melted into harmony by the rivers of gold that ran boldly among them, went to her very heart. A Greek is half an oriental; and Zoe had what may be called the courage of colour. "Glorious!" she cried, and clasped her hands. "And see! what a background to the emerald grass outside, and the ruby flowers! They seem to come into the room through those monster windows."

"Splendid!" said Harrington, to whom all this was literally Greek. "I'm so excited I'll order dinner."

"Dinner!" said Zoe disdainfully; and sat down and eyed

the Mauresque walls around her, and the beauties of nature outside, and brought them together in one picture.

Harrington was a long time in conclave with M. Chevet. Then Zoe became impatient.

"Oh, do leave off ordering dinner," said she, "and take me out to that other paradise."

The Chevet shrugged his shoulders with pity. Vizard shrugged his too to soothe him: and after a few more hurried words, took the lover of colour into the garden. It was delicious, with green slopes, and rich foliage, and flowers, and enlivened by bright silk dresses, sparkling fitfully among the green leaves, or flaming out boldly in the sun; and as luck would have it, before Zoe had taken ten steps upon the green sward, the band of fifty musicians struck up, and played as fifty men rarely play together out of Germany.

Zoe was enchanted. She walked on air, and beamed as bright as any flower in the place.

After her first ejaculation at the sudden music, she did not speak for a good while; her content was so great. At last she said, "And do they leave this paradise to gamble in a room?"

"Leave it? They shun it. The gamblers despise the flowers."

"How perverse people are! Excitement! Who wants any more than this?"

"Zoe," said Vizard, "innocent excitement can never compete with vicious."

"What! is it really wicked to play?"

"I don't know about wicked: you girls always run to the biggest word. But if avarice is a vice, gambling cannot be virtuous; for the root of gambling is mere avarice, weak avarice. Come, my young friend, *as we're quite alone*, I'll drop Thersites and talk sense to you for once. Child, there are two roads to wealth: one is by the way of industry, skill, vigilance, and self-denial; and these are virtues, though sometimes they go with tricks of trade, hardness of heart, and taking advantage of misfortune, to buy cheap and sell dear. The other road to wealth is by bold speculation, with risk of proportionate loss; in short, by gambling with cards, or without them. Now look into the mind of the gambler; he wants to make money, contrary to nature, and unjustly. He wants to be rewarded without merit, to make a fortune in a moment, and without industry, vigilance, true skill, or self-denial; 'a penny saved is a penny gained,' does not

enter his creed. Strip the thing of its disguise, it is avarice, sordid avarice: and I call it weak avarice; because the gambler relies on chance alone, yet accepts uneven chances, and hopes that Fortune will be as much in love with him as he is with himself. What silly egotism! You admire the Kursaal, and you are right. Then do just ask yourself why is there nothing to pay for so many expensive enjoyments, and very little to pay for concerts and balls; low prices at the opera, which never pays its own expenses; even Chevet's dinners are reasonable if you avoid his sham Johannisberg. All these cheap delights—the gold, the colours, the garden, the music, the lights—are paid for by the losses of feeble-minded Avarice. But, there—I said all this to Ned Severne, and I might as well have preached sense to the wind."

"Harrington, I will not play. I am much happier walking with my good brother——"

"Faute de mieux."

Zoe blushed, but would not hear—"and it is so good of you to make a friend of me, and talk sense. Oh!—see!—a lady with two blues!—Come and look at her."

Before they had taken five steps, Zoe stopped short and said, "It is Fanny Dover, I declare. She has not seen us yet. She is short-sighted. Come here." And the impetuous maid dragged him off behind a tuft of foliage.

When she had got him there she said hotly that it was too bad.

"Oh, is it?" said he very calmly. "What?"

"Why, don't you see what she has done? You, so sensible, to be so slow about women's ways; and you are always pretending to know them. Why, she has gone and bought that costume with the money you gave her to play with."

"Sensible girl!"

"Dishonest girl! *I* call her."

"There you go to your big words. No, no. A little money was given her for a bad purpose. She has used it for a frivolous one. That is 'a step in the right direction'—jargon of the day."

"But to receive money for one purpose and apply it to another, is,—what do you call it—*chose?—détournement de fonds*—what is the English word? I've been abroad till I've forgotten English; oh, I know—embezzlement."

"Well, that is a big word for a small transaction; you have not dug in the mine of the vernacular for nothing."

"Harrington, if you don't mind, I do: so please come. I'll talk to her."

"Stop a moment," said Vizard, very gravely. "You will not say one word to her."

"And why not, pray?"

"Because it would be unworthy of us, and cruel to her: barbarously cruel. What! call her to account before that old woman and me?"

"Why not? She is flaunting her blues before you two, and plenty more."

"Feminine logic, Zoe. The point is this—she is poor. You must know that. This comes of poverty and love of dress; not of dishonesty and love of dress: and just ask yourself, is there a creature that ought to be pitied more and handled more delicately than a *poor lady?* Why, you would make her writhe with shame and distress. Well, I do think there is not a single wild animal so cruel to another wild animal as a woman is to a woman. You are cruel to one another by instinct. But I appeal to your reason—if you have any."

Zoe's eyes filled. "You are right," said she humbly. "Thank you for thinking for me. I will not say a word to her before *you.*"

"That is a good girl. But, come now, why say a word at all?"

"Oh, it is no use your demanding impossibilities, dear; I could no more help speaking to her than I could fly; and don't go fancying she will care a pin what I say, if I don't say it before a *gentleman.*"

Having given him this piece of information, she left her ambush and proceeded to meet the all unconscious blue girl; but, even as they went, Vizard returned to his normal condition, and doled out, rather indolently, that they were out on pleasure, and might possibly miss the object of the excursion if they were to encourage a habit of getting into rages about nothing.

Zoe was better than her word. She met Fanny with open admiration: to be sure, she knew that apathy, or even tranquillity, on first meeting the Blues, would be instantly set down to envy.

"And where did you get it, dear?"

"At quite a small shop."

"French?"

"Oh no; I think she was an Austrian. This is not a

French mixture: loud, discordant colours, that is the French taste."

"Here is heresy," said Vizard. "Why, I thought the French beat the world, in dress."

"Yes, dear," said Zoe, "in form and pattern: but Fanny is right; they make mistakes in colour. They are terribly afraid of scarlet; but they are afraid of nothing else: and many of their mixtures are as discordant to the eye as Wagner's music to the ear. Now, after all, scarlet is the king of colours; and there is no harm in King Scarlet if you treat him with respect, and put a modest subject next to him."

"Gipsy locks, for instance," suggested Fanny slily.

Miss Maitland owned herself puzzled. "In my day," said she, "no one ever thought of putting blue upon blue; but really, somehow, it looks well."

"May I tell you why, aunt?—because the dressmaker had a real eye, and has chosen the right tints of blue. It is all nonsense about one *colour* not going with another. Nature defies that; and how? by choosing the very *tints* of each colour that will go together. The sweetest room I ever saw was painted by a great artist; and, do you know, he had coloured the ceiling blue and the walls green: and I assure you the effect was heavenly: but then he had chosen the exact tints of green and blue that would go together. The draperies were between crimson and maroon. But there's another thing in Fanny's dress; it is velvet. Now blue velvet is blue to the mind; but it is not blue to the eye. You try and paint blue velvet; you will be surprised how much white you must lay on. The high lights of all velvets are white. This white helps to blend the two tints of blue."

"This is very instructive," said Vizard; "I was not aware I had a sister, youthful, but profound. Let us go in and dine."

Fanny demurred. She said she believed Miss Maitland wished to take one turn round the grounds first.

Miss Maitland stared, but assented in a mechanical way; and they commenced their promenade.

Zoe hung back and beckoned her brother. "Miss Maitland!" said she, with such an air. "*She* wants to show her blues to all the world and his wife."

"Very natural," said Vizard "So would you if you were in a scarlet gown with a crimson cloak."

Zoe laughed heartily at this, and forgave Fanny her new

dress: but she had a worse bone than that to pick with her.

It was a short but agreeable promenade to Zoe; for now they were alone, her brother, instead of sneering, complimented her.

"Never you mind my impertinence," said he; "the truth is, I am proud of you. You are an observer."

"Me? Oh—in colour."

"Never mind: an observer is an observer; and genuine observation is not so common. Men see and hear with their prejudices and not their senses. Now we are going to those gaming-tables. At first, of course, you will play; but as soon as ever you are cleaned out, observe! Let nothing escape that woman's eye of yours: and so we'll get something for our money."

"Harrington," said the girl proudly, "I will be all eye and ear."

Soon after this they went in to dinner. Zoe cast her eyes round for Severne, and was manifestly disappointed at his not meeting them even there.

As for Fanny she had attracted wonderful attention in the garden, and was elated; her conscience did not prick her in the least for such a trifle as *détournement de fonds:* and public admiration did not improve her. She was sprightly and talkative as usual; but now she was also a trifle brazen and pert all round.

And so the dinner passed, and they proceeded to the gaming-tables.

Miss Maitland and Zoe led. Fanny and Harrington followed: for Miss Dover, elated by the blues—though, by-the-by, one hears of them as depressing—and encouraged by admiration and Chevet's violet-perfumed St. Peray, took Harrington's arm really as if it belonged to her.

They went into the library first, and after a careless inspection, came to the great attraction of the place. They entered one of the gambling-rooms.

The first impression was disappointing. There were two very long tables, rounded off at the ends: one for *trente et quarante* and one for *roulette.* At each table were seated a number of persons, and others standing behind them. Amongst the persons seated were the dealer, or, in *roulette,* the spinner. These officials sat in the centre, flanked on each side by croupiers with rakes; but at each end of the table there was also a croupier with his rake.

The rest were players or lookers-on; most of whom, by well-known gradations of curiosity and weakness, to describe which minutely would be to write a little comedy that others have already written, were drawn into playing at last. So fidgets the moth before the candle before he makes up, what no doubt, the poor little soul calls his mind.

Our little party stopped first at *trente et quarante*, and Zoe commenced her observations. Instead of the wild excitement she had heard of, there was a subdued air, a forced quiet, especially among the seated players. A stern etiquette presided, and the gamblers shrouded themselves in well-bred stoicism — losing without open distress or ire, winning without open exulation. The old hands, especially, began play with a padlock on the tongue and a mask upon the face. There are masks, however, that do not hide the eye; and Miss Vizard caught some flashes that escaped the masks even then at the commencement of the play. Still, external stoicism prevailed, on the whole, and had a fixed example in the *tailleur* and the croupiers: playing many hours every day in the year but Good Friday, and always with other people's money, these men had parted with passion, and almost with sensation; they had become skilful automata, chanting a stave, and raking up or scattering haycocks of gold which to them were counters.

It was with the monotonous voice of an automaton they intoned—

"Faites votre jeu, Messieurs."

Then, after a pause of ten seconds—

"Le jeu est fait."

Then, after two seconds—

"Rien ne va plus."

Then mumble—mumble—mumble.

Then, "Rouge perd et couleur," or whatever might be the result.

Then the croupiers first raked in the players' losses with vast expedition; next they chucked the precise amount of the winnings on to each stake with unerring dexterity and the indifference of machines, and the chant recommenced, "Faites votre jeu, Messieurs."

Pause, ten seconds.

"Le jeu est fait."

Pause, two seconds.

"Rien ne va plus."

The *tailleur* dealt, and the croupier intoned, "Rouge gagne

et couleur perd;" the mechanical raking and dexterous chucking followed.

This with a low buzzing, and the deadened jingle of gold upon green cloth, and the light grating of the croupiers' rakes was the first impression upon Zoe's senses; but the mere game did not monopolise her attention many seconds. There were other things better worth noting: the great varieties of human type that a single passion had brought together in a small German town. Her ear was regaled with such a polyglot murmur as she had read of in Genesis, but had never witnessed before.

Here were the sharp Tuscan and the mellow Roman; the sibilation of England, the brogue of Ireland, the Shibboleth of the Minories, the twang of certain American States, the guttural expectoration of Germany, the nasal emphasis of France, and even the modulated Hindostanee, and the sonorous Spanish all mingling.

The types of face were as various as the tongues.

Here was the green-eyed Tartar, the black-eyed Italian, and the grey-eyed Saxon; faces all cheek-bones, and faces no cheek-bones; the red Arabian, the fair Dane, and the dark Hindoo.

Her woman's eye seized another phenomenon—the hands. Not nations only, but varieties of the animal kingdom were represented. Here were the white hands of fair women, and the red paws of obese shopkeepers, and the yellow, bird-like claws of old withered gamesters, all stretched out, side by side, in strange contrast, to place the stakes or scratch in the winnings; and often the winners put their palms and paws on their heap of gold, just as a dog does on a bone when other dogs are nigh.

But what Zoe's eye rested on longest was the costume and deportment of the ladies. A few were in good taste; others aimed at a greater variety of beautiful colours, than the fair have up to this date succeeded in combining, without inflicting more pain on the beholders than a beneficent Creator—so far as we can judge by His own system of colour—intended the cultivated eye to suffer. Example—as the old writers used to say—one lady fired the air in primrose satin with red velvet trimming. This mild mixture reappeared on her head in a primrose hat with a red feather. A gold chain, so big that it would have done for a felon instead of a fool, encircled her neck, and was weighted with innumerable lockets, which in size and inventive taste re-

sembled a poached egg, and betrayed the insular goldsmith. A train three yards long completed this gorgeous figure. She had commenced life a shrimp-girl, and pushed a dredge before her instead of pulling a silken besom after her. Another stately queen (with an "a") heated the atmosphere with a burnous of that colour the French call *flamme d'enfer*, and cooled it with a green bonnet. A third appeared to have been struck with the beauty of a painter's palette, and the skill with which its colours mix before the brush spoils them. Green body, violet skirts, rose-coloured trimmings, purple sleeves, light-green boots, lavender gloves. A shawl all gauze and gold, flounced like a petticoat; a bonnet so small and red feather so enormous and all-predominant, that a peacock seemed to be sitting on a hedge sparrow's nest.

Zoe suspected these polychromatic ladies at a glance, and observed their manners in a mistrustful spirit, carefully. She was little surprised, though a good deal shocked, to find that some of them seemed familiar, and almost jocular, with the croupiers; and that, although they did not talk loud, being kept in order by the general etiquette, they rustled, and fidgeted, and played in a devil-may-care sort of manner. This was in great measure accounted for by the circumstance that they were losing other people's money. At all events, they often turned their heads over their shoulders, and applied for fresh funds to their male companions.

Zoe blushed at all this and said to Vizard, "I should like to see the other rooms." She whispered to Miss Maitland, "Surely they are not very select in this one."

"Lead on," said Vizard; "that is the way."

Fanny had not parted with his arm all this time. As they followed the others he said, "But she will find it is all the same thing."

Fanny laughed in his face. "Don't you *see?* C'est la chasse au Severne qui commence."

"En voila un Sévère," replied he.

She was mute. She had not learned that sort of French in her finishing school. I forgive it.

The next room was the same thing over again.

Zoe stood a moment and drank everything in, then turned to Vizard, blushed, and said, "May we play a little now?"

"Why, of course."

"Fanny!"

"No; you begin, dear. We will stand by and wish you success."

"You are a coward," said Zoe loftily; and went to the table with more changes of colour than veteran lancers betray in charging infantry. It was the *roulette* table she chose. That seems a law of her sex. The true solution is not so profound as some that have been offered. It is this: *trente et quarante* is not only unintelligible but uninteresting. At *roulette* there is a pictorial object and dramatic incident; the board, the turning of the *moulinet*, and the swift revolutions of an ivory ball, its lowered speed, its irregular bounds, and its final settlement in one of the many holes, numbered and coloured. Here the female understanding sees something it can grasp, and, above all, the female eye catches something pictorial and amusing outside the loss or gain; and so she goes, by her nature, to *roulette*, which is a greater swindle than the other.

Zoe staked five pounds on No. 21 for an excellent reason; she was in her twenty-first year. The ball was so illogical as to go into No. 3, and she lost. She stood by her number and lost again. She lost thirteen times in succession.

The fourteenth time the ball rolled into 21, and the croupier handed her thirty-five times her stake, and a lot more for colour.

Her eye flashed, and her cheek flushed, and I suppose she was tempted to bet more heavily, for she said, "No; that will never happen to me again, I know:" and she arose, the richer by several napoleons, and said, "Now let us go to another."

"Humph!" said Vizard. "What an extraordinary girl! She will give the devil more trouble than most of you. Here's precocious prudence."

Fanny laughed in his face. "C'est la chasse qui recommence," said she.

I ought to explain that when she was in England she did not interlard her discourse with French scraps. She was not so ill-bred. But abroad she had got into a way of it through being often compelled to speak French.

Vizard appreciated the sagacity of the remark, but he did not like the lady any the better for it. He meditated in silence. He remembered that, when they were in the garden, Zoe had hung behind, and interpreted Fanny ill-naturedly; and here was Fanny at the same game, literally backbiting, or back-nibbling at all events. Said he to him-

self, "And these two are friends! female friends." And he nursed his misogyny in silence.

They came into a very noble room, the largest of all, with enormous mirrors down to the ground, and a ceiling blazing with gold, and the air glittering with lustres. Two very large tables, and a distinguished company at each, especially at the *trente et quarante.*

Before our little party had taken six steps into the room Zoe stood like a pointer; and Fanny backed. Should these terms seem disrespectful let Fanny bear the blame. It is her application of the word "chasse" that drew down the simile.

Yes, there sat Ned Severne, talking familiarly to Joseph Ashmead, and preparing to "put the pot on," as he called it.

Now Zoe was so far gone that the very sight of Severne was a balsam to her. She had a little bone to pick with him; and when he was out of sight, the bone seemed pretty large. But when she saw his adorable face, unconscious, as it seemed, of wrong, the bone faded, and the face shone.

Her own face cleared at the sight of him: she turned back to Fanny and Vizard, arch and smiling, and put her finger to her mouth, as much as to say, "Let us have some fun. We have caught our truant: let us watch him, unseen, a little before we burst on him."

Vizard enjoyed this and encouraged her with a nod.

The consequence was that Zoe dropped Miss Maitland's arm, who took that opportunity to turn up her nose—and began to creep up like a young cat after a bird; taking a step and then pausing; then another step and a long pause; and still with her eye fixed on Severne. He did not see her nor her companions, partly because they were not in front of him, but approaching at a sharp angle, and also because he was just then beginning to bet heavily on his system. By this means two progressive events went on contemporaneously: the arch but cat-like advance of Zoe with pauses, and the betting of Severne, in which he gave himself the benefit of his system.

Noir, having been the last to win, he went against the alternation and put £50 on *noir.* Red won. Then, true to his system, he doubled on the winning colour. £100 on red. Black won. He doubled on black and red won; and there was £400 of his £500 gone in five minutes.

On this proof that the likeliest thing to happen—viz.,

alternation of the colour—does *sometimes* happen, Severne lost heart.

He turned to Ashmead with all the superstition of a gambler, "For God's sake, bet for me!" said he. He clutched his own hair convulsively in a struggle with his mania, and prevailed so far as to thrust £50 into his own pocket to live on, and gave Ashmead five tens.

"Well, but," said Ashmead, "you must tell me what to do."

"No, no. Bet your own way for *me*."

He had hardly uttered these words when he seemed to glare across the table at the great mirror, and suddenly putting his handkerchief to his mouth, he made a bolt sideways, plunged amidst the bystanders, and emerged only to dash into a room at the side.

As he disappeared a lady came slowly and pensively forward from the outer door: lifted her eyes as she neared the table, saw a vacant chair and glided into it, revealing, to Zoe Vizard and her party, a noble face, not so splendid and animated as on the stage, for its expression was slumbering; still it was the face of Ina Klosking.

No transformation trick was ever done more neatly and smoothly than this, in which, nevertheless, the performers acted without concert.

Severne fled out, and the Klosking came slowly in; yet no one had time to take the seat, she glided into it so soon after Severne had vacated it.

Zoe Vizard and her friends stared after the flying Severne; then stared at the new-comer; and then turned round and stared at each other in mutual amazement and inquiry.

What was the meaning of this double incident, that resembled a conjurer's trick?

Having looked at her companions, and seen only her own surprise reflected, Zoe Vizard fixed her eyes, like burning-glasses, upon Ina Klosking.

Then that lady thickened the mystery. She seemed very familiar with the man Severne had been so familiar with.

That man contributed his share to the multiplying mystery. He had a muddy complexion, hair the colour of dirt, a long nose, a hatchet face, mean little eyes, and was evidently not a gentleman: he wore a brown velveteen shooting-coat, with a magenta tie that gave Zoe a pain in the eye. She had already felt sorry to see her Severne was acquainted with such a man; he seemed to her the *ne plus ultra* of vulgarity; and

now, behold, the artist, the woman she had so admired, was equally familiar with the same objectionable person.

To appreciate the hopeless puzzle of Zoe Vizard the reader must be on his guard against his own knowledge. *He* knows that Severne and Ashmead were two Bohemians, who had struck up acquaintance, all in a minute, that very evening. But Zoe had not this knowledge; and she could not possibly divine it. The whole thing was presented to her senses thus —a vulgar man, with a brown velveteen shooting-coat and a red-hot tie, was a mutual friend of the gentlemanly Severne and the dignified Klosking. Severne left the mutual friend; Mademoiselle Klosking joined the mutual friend; and there she sat where Severne had sat a moment ago, by the side of their mutual friend.

All manner of thoughts and surmises thronged upon Zoe Vizard; but each way of accounting for the mystery contradicted some plain fact or other: so she was driven at last to a woman's remedy. She would wait and watch. Severne would probably come back and somehow furnish the key; meantime her eye was not likely to leave the Klosking, nor her ear to miss a syllable the Klosking might utter.

She whispered to Vizard in a very peculiar tone, "I will play at this table," and stepped up to it with the word.

The duration of such beauty as Zoe's is proverbially limited; but the limit to its power, while it does last, has not yet been discovered. It is a fact that, as soon as she came close to the table, two male gamblers looked up, saw her, wondered at her, and actually jumped up and offered their seats: she made a courteous inclination of the head, and installed Miss Maitland in one seat without reserve. She put a little gold on the table, and asked Miss Maitland, in a whisper, to play for her. She herself had neither eye nor ear except for Ina Klosking. That lady was having a discussion, *sotto voce*, with Ashmead; and if she had been one of your mumblers, whose name is legion, even Zoe's swift ear could have caught little or nothing. But when a voice has volume, and the great habit of articulation has been brought to perfection, the words travel surprisingly.

Zoe heard the lady say to Ashmead, scarcely above her breath, "Well, but if he requested you to bet for him how can he blame you?"

Zoe could not catch Ashmead's reply, but it was accompanied by a shake of the head: so she understood him to object.

Then after a little more discussion, Ina Klosking said, "What money have you of mine?"

Ashmead produced some notes.

"Very well," said the Klosking. "Now I shall take my twenty-five pounds, and twenty-five pounds of his, and play. When he returns we shall, at all events, have twenty-five pounds safe for him. I take the responsibility."

"Oh," thought Zoe, "then he *is* coming back. Ah, I shall see what all this means." She felt sick at heart.

Zoe Vizard was on the other side, but not opposite Mademoiselle Klosking; she was considerably to the right hand, and as the new-comer was much occupied, just at first, with Ashmead, who sat on her left, Zoe had time to dissect her, which she did without mercy. Well, her costume was beautifully made, and fitted on a symmetrical figure; but as to colour, it was neutral — a warm French grey — and neither courted admiration nor risked censure; it was unpretending. Her lace collar was valuable, but not striking. Her hair was beautiful, both in gloss and colour, and beautifully, but neatly arranged. Her gloves and wristbands were perfect.

As every woman aims at appearance, openly or secretly, and every other woman knows she does, Zoe did not look at this meek dress with male simplicity, unsuspicious of design, but asked herself what was the leading motive; and the question was no sooner asked than answered. "She has dressed for her golden hair and her white throat. Her hair, her deep grey eyes, and her skin, are just like a flower: she has dressed herself as the modest stalk. She is an artist."

At the same table were a Russian Princess, an English Countess, and a Bavarian Duchess, all well dressed upon the whole; but their dresses showed off their dresses; the Klosking's showed off herself. And there was a native dignity, and, above all, a wonderful seemliness about the Klosking that inspired respect. Dress and deportment were all of a piece—decent and deep.

While Zoe was picking her to pieces, Ina, having settled matters with Ashmead, looked up, and of course took in every other woman who was in sight at a single sweep. She recognised Zoe directly, with a flush of pleasure; a sweet, bright expression broke over her face, and she bowed to her with a respectful cordiality that was captivating. Zoe yielded to the charm of manner, and bowed and smiled in return, though, till that moment, she had

been knitting her black brows at her in wonder and vague suspicion.

Ina trifled with her game at first. Ashmead was still talking to her of the young swell and his system. He explained it to her and how it had failed. "Not but what," said he, "there is a great deal in it most evenings. But to-day there are no runs; it is all turn and turn about. If it would rain now, you would see a change."

"Well," said Ina, "I will bet a few pounds on red, then on black, till these runs begin."

During the above conversation, of which Zoe caught little, because Ashmead was the chief speaker, she cast her eyes all round the table and saw a curious assemblage of figures.

There was a solemn Turk melting his piastres with admirable gravity; there was the Russian Princess; and there was a lady, dressed in loud, incongruous colours, such as once drew from a horrified *modiste* the cry, "Ah, Dieu! quelle immoralité!!" and that's a fact. There was a Popish priest looking sheepish as he staked his silver; and an Anglican rector betting fivers, and as nonchalant, in the blest absence of his flock and the Baptist minister, as if he was playing at whist with the old Bishop of Norwich, who played a nightly rubber in my father's day—and a very bad one. There was a French Count, nearly six feet high, to whom the word "old" would have been unjust: he was antique, and had turned into bones and leather; but the hair on that dilapidated trunk was its own; and Zoe preferred him much to the lusty old English beau beside him, with ivory teeth and ebon locks that cost a pretty penny.

There was a fat, livid Neapolitan, betting heavily; there was a creole lady, with a fine oval face rather sallow, and eyes and hair as black as Zoe's own. Indeed the creole excelled her by the addition of a little black fringe upon her upper lip, that, prejudice apart, became her very well. Her front hair was confined by two gold threads, a little way apart, on which were fixed a singular ornament, the vivid eyes of a peacock's tail set close together all round. It was glorious, regal. The hussy should have been the Queen of Sheba receiving Solomon, and showing her peacock's eyes against his crown jewels. Like the lilies of the field, these products of nature are bad to beat, as we say on Yorkshire turf.

Indeed that frontlet was so beautiful and well placed, it drew forth glances of marked disdain from every lady within sight of it, Zoe excepted. She was placable. This was a

lesson in colour; and she managed to forgive the teacher in consideration of the lesson.

Amidst the gaudier birds there was a dove—a young lady, well-dressed, with Quaker-like simplicity, in grey silk dress with no trimmings, a white silk bonnet and veil. Her face was full of virtues. Meeting her elsewhere, you would say, "That is a good wife, a good daughter, and the making of a good mother." Her expression at the table was thoughtful and a little anxious; but every now and then she turned her head to look for her husband, and gave him so sweet a smile of conjugal sympathy and affection as made Zoe almost pray they might win. The husband was an officer, a veteran, with grizzled hair and moustache, a colonel who had commanded a brigade in action, but could only love and spoil his wife. He ought to have been her father, her friend, her commander, and marched her out of that "Curse-all" to the top of Cader Idris, if need was. Instead of that he stood behind her chair like a lackey all day: for this dove was as desperate a gambler as any in Europe; it was not that she bet very heavily, but that she bet every day and all day. She began in the afternoon and played till midnight if there was a table going. She knew no day of religion—no day of rest. She won and she lost: her own fortune and her husband's stood the money drain; but how about the golden hours? She was losing her youth and wasting her soul. Yet the Administration gave her a warning; they did not allow the irretrievable hours to be stolen from her with a noiseless hand. At All Soul's College, Oxford, in the first quadrangle, grave, thoughtful men raised to the top storey, two hundred years ago, a grand sundial, the largest, perhaps, and noblest in the kingdom. They set it on the face of the Quad, and wrote over the long pointers, in large letters of gold, these words, "Pereunt et imputantur," which refer to the hours indicated below, and mean literally, "They perish, and go down to our account"; but really imply a little more —viz., that "they are wasted and go to our debit." These are true words, and big words, bigger than any Royal Commissioner has uttered up to date, and reach the mind through the senses, and have warned the scholars of many a generation not to throw away the seed-time of their youth, which never can come twice to any man. Well, the Administration of the Kursaal conveyed to that lost English dove and others a note of warning, which struck the senses, as does the immortal warning emblazoned on the fair brow of that beautiful

college; only, in the Kursaal the warning struck the ear, not the eye. They provided French clocks with a singularly clear metallic striking tick; their blows upon the life of Time rang sharp above the chant, the mumble, and the jingle. These clocks seemed to cry aloud, and say of the hours, whose waste they recorded, "Pere-unt-et-impu-tantur, pere-unt-et-impu-tantur."

Reckless of this protest the waves of play rolled on, and ere long, sucked all our characters, but Vizard, into the vortex. Zoe hazarded a sovereign on red, and won; then two on black, and won; then four on red, and won. She was launched, and Fanny too. They got excited and bet higher; the croupiers pelted them with golden coins, and they began to pant and flush, and their eyes to gleam. The old gamblers' eyes seem to have lost this power—they have grown fishy; but the eyes of these female novices were a sight. Fanny's, being light grey, gleamed like a panther's whose prey is within leap. Zoe's dark orbs could not resemble any wild beast's; but they glowed with unholy fire: and, indeed, all down the table was now seen that which no painter can convey—for his beautiful, but contracted art confines him to a moment of time—and writers have strangely neglected to notice—viz., *the progress of the countenance* under play. Many of the masks melted as if they had been of wax, and the natural expressions forced their way; some got flushed with triumph, others wild and haggard with their losses. One ghastly glaring loser sat quite quiet when his all was gone; but clenched his hands so that the nails ran into the flesh, and blood trickled: discovering which, a friend dragged him off like something dead. Nobody minded.

The fat old beau got worried by his teeth, and pulled them out in a pet and pocketed them.

Miss Maitland, who had begun with her grey hair in neat little curls, deranged one so with convulsive hand, that it came all down her cheek, and looked most rakish and unbecoming. Even Zoe and Fanny had turned from lambs to leopardesses. Patches of red on each cheek and eyes like red-hot coals.

The colours had begun to run, and at first the players lost largely to the bank, with one exception.

Ina Klosking discerned the change, and backed the winning colour, then doubled on it twice. She did this so luckily three or four times that, though her single stake was, at first,

only £40, gold seemed to grow around her; and even notes to rise and make a cushion. She, too, was excited, though not openly; her gloves were off, and her own lovely hand, the whitest in the room, placed the stakes. You might see a red spot on her cheek-bone, and a strange glint in her deep eye; but she could not do anything that was not seemly.

She played calmly, boldly, on the system that had cleared out Ned Severne, and she won heavily, because she was in luck. It was her hour and her vein.

By this time Zoe and Fanny were cleaned out; and looked in amazement at the Klosking, and wondered how she did it.

Miss Maitland at her last sovereign, began to lean on the victorious Klosking, and bet as she did: her pile increased. The dove caught sight of her game and backed her luck. The creole backed her heavily.

Presently there was an extraordinary run on black. Numbers were caught. The Klosking won three times and lost three times: but the bets she won were double bets, and those she lost were single.

Then came a *refait*, and the bank swept off half her stake; but even here she was lucky. She had only £40 on.

By-and-by came the event of the night. Black had, for some time, appeared to rule the roost, and thrust red off the table; and the Klosking lost £200.

The Klosking put £200 on red; it won. She doubled: red won. She left the £400—the maximum. There was a dead silence. The creole lady put the maximum on red, £400. Red won. Ina Klosking looked a little pale: but, driven by some unaccountable impulse, she played the maximum again. So did the creole. Red won. The automata chucked £1200 to the Klosking, and £800 to the other lady. Ina betted £40 on black. Red won again. She put £200 on black: black won. She doubled: black won again. She played the maximum: black won. Maximum again: black won.

The creole and others stood with her in that last run, and the money was chucked. But the settlement was followed by a short whisper, and a croupier, in a voice as mechanical as ever, chanted that the sum set apart for that table was exhausted for that day.

The Klosking and her backers had broken the bank.

CHAPTER X

THERE was a buzzing and a thronging round the victorious player.

Ina rose, and with a delicate movement of her milk-white hand, turned the mountain of gold and column of notes towards Ashmead. "Make haste, please," she whispered; then put on her gloves deliberately, while Ashmead shoved the gold and the notes anyhow into the inner pockets of his shooting-jacket, and buttoned it well up.

"*Allons,*" said she calmly, and took his arm; but, as she moved away, she saw Zoe Vizard passing on the other side of the table. Their eyes met: she dropped Ashmead's arm, and made her a sweeping curtsey full of polite consideration, and a sort of courteous respect for the person saluted, coupled with a certain dignity; and then she looked wistfully at her a moment. I believe she would have spoken to her if she had been alone; but Miss Maitland and Fanny Dover had, both of them, a trick of putting on *noli me tangere* faces amongst strangers. It did not mean much; it is an unfortunate English habit: but it repels foreigners; they neither do it nor understand it.

Those two faces, not downright forbidding, but uninviting, turned the scale; and the Klosking, who was not a forward woman, did not yield to her inclination and speak to Zoe. She took Ashmead's arm again and moved away.

Then Zoe turned back and beckoned Vizard. He joined her. "There she is," said Zoe: "shall I speak to her?"

Would you believe it? He thought a moment, and then said gloomily, "Well?—no. Half cured now. Seen the lover in time." So that opportunity was frittered away.

Before the English party left the Kursaal, Zoe asked timidly if they ought not to make some inquiry about Mr. Severne. He had been taken ill again.

"Ay, taken ill, and gone to be cured at another table," said Vizard ironically. "I'll make the tour and collar him."

He went off in a hurry: Miss Maitland faced a glass and proceeded to arrange her curl.

Fanny, though she had offered no opposition to Vizard's going, now seized Zoe's arm with unusual energy, and almost dragged her aside. "The idea of sending Harrington on

that fool's errand!" said she peevishly. "Why, Zoe! where are your eyes?"

Zoe showed her by opening them wide. "What *do* you mean?"

"What—do—I—mean? No matter. Mr. Severne is not in this building, and you know it."

"How can I know? All is so mysterious," faltered Zoe. "How do *you* know?"

"Because—there—least said is soonest mended."

"Fanny, you are older than me, and ever so much cleverer. Tell me, or you are not my friend."

"Wait till you get home, then. Here he is."

Vizard told them he had been through all the rooms: the only chance now was the dining-room. "No," said Fanny, "we wish to get home: we are rather tired."

They went to the rail; and, at first, Vizard was rather talkative, making his comments on the players; but the ladies were taciturn, and brought him to a stand. "Ah," thought he, "nothing interests them now; Adonis is not here." So he retired within himself.

When they reached the "Russie," he ordered a *petit souper* in an hour, and invited the ladies. Meantime they retired; Miss Maitland to her room, and Fanny, with Zoe, to hers. By this time Miss Dover had lost her alacrity, and would, I verily believe, have shunned a *tête-à-tête* if she could; but there was a slight paleness in Zoe's cheek, and a compression of the lips, which told her plainly that young lady meant to have it out with her. They both knew so well what was coming that Zoe merely waved her to a chair, and leaned herself against the bed, and said, "Now, Fanny." So Fanny was brought to bay.

"Dear me," said she piteously, "I don't know what to do between you and Aunt Maitland. If I say all I think, I suppose you will hate me; and, if I don't, I shall be told I'm wicked, and don't warn an orphan girl. She flew at me like a bull-dog before your brother; she said I was twenty-five, and I only own to twenty-three. And after all what could I say? for I do feel I ought to give you the benefit of my experience, and make myself as disagreeable as *she* does. And I *have* given you a hint, and a pretty broad one; but you want such plain speaking."

"I do," said Zoe. "So please speak plainly—if you can."

"Ah, you *say* that."

"And I mean it. Never mind consequences; tell me the truth."

"Like a man, eh? and get hated."

"Men are well worth imitating, in some things. Tell me the truth, pleasant or not; and I shall always respect you."

"Bother respect. I am like the rest of us; I want to be loved a little bit. But there—I'm in for it. I have said too much, or too little. I know that. Well, Zoe, the long and the short is—you have a rival."

Zoe turned rather pale, but was not so much shaken as Fanny expected.

She received the blow in silence. But, after a while, she said, with some firmness, "Mademoiselle Klosking?"

"Oh, you are not quite blind, then."

"And pray which does he prefer?" asked Zoe, a little proudly.

"It is plain he likes you the best. But why does he fear her so? This is where you seem all in the dark. He flew out of the opera lest she should see him."

"Oh! Absurd!"

"He cut you and Vizard rather than call upon her with you."

"And so he did."

"He flew from the gambling-table the moment she entered the room."

"Behind him. She came in behind him."

"There was a large mirror in front of him."

"Oh, Fanny! oh!" and Zoe clasped her hands piteously. But she recovered herself and said, "After all, appearances are deceitful."

"Not so deceitful as men," said Fanny sharply.

But Zoe clung to her straw. "Might not two things happen together? He is subject to bleeding at the nose. It is strange it should occur twice so; but it is possible."

"Zoe," said Fanny gravely, "he is not subject to bleeding at the nose."

"Oh! *then*—but how can you know that? what right have you to say that?"

"I'll show you," said Fanny, and left the room.

She soon came back, holding something behind her back. Even at the last moment she was half unwilling. However, she looked down and said, in a very peculiar tone, "Here is the handkerchief he put before his face at the opera; there!" and she threw it into Zoe's lap.

Zoe's nature revolted against evidence so obtained. She did not even take up the handkerchief. "What!" she cried; "you took it out of his pocket?"

"No."

"Then you have been in his room and got it."

"*Nothing of the kind!* I sent Rosa."

"My maid!"

"Mine, for that job. I gave her half-a-crown, to borrow it for a pattern."

Zoe seized the handkerchief and ran her eye over it in a moment. There was no trace of blood on it, and there were his initials, "E. S.," in the corner. Her woman's eye fastened instantly on these. "Silk?" said she, and held it up to the light. "No. Hair!—golden hair. It is *hers!*" And she flung the handkerchief from her as if it was a viper, and even when on the ground eyed it with dilating orbs and a hostile horror.

"La!" said Fanny; "fancy that! You are not blind now. You have seen more than me. I made sure it was yellow silk."

But this frivolous speech never even entered Zoe's ear. She was too deeply shocked. She went, feebly, and sat down in a chair, and covered her face with her hands.

Fanny eyed her with pity. "There," said she, almost crying, "I never tell the truth but I bitterly repent it."

Zoe took no notice of this droll apophthegm. Her hands began to work. "What shall I do?" she said; "what shall I do?"

"Oh, don't go on like that, Zoe!" cried Fanny. "After all it is you he prefers. He ran away from her."

"Ah, yes. But why?—why? What has he done?"

"Jilted her, I suppose. Aunt Maitland thinks he is after money: and, you know, you have got money."

"Have I nothing else?" said the proud beauty; and lifted her bowed head for a moment.

"You have everything. But you should look things in the face. Is that singer an unattractive woman?"

"Oh, no; but she is not poor. Her kind of talent is paid enormously."

"That is true," said Fanny. "But perhaps she wastes it. She is a gambler like himself."

"Let him go to her," said Zoe wildly. "I will share no man's heart."

"He will never go to her, unless—well, unless we tell him that she has broken the bank with his money."

"If you think so badly of him, tell him then, and let him go. Oh, I am wretched! I am wretched!" She lifted her hands in despair, and began to cry and sob bitterly.

Fanny was melted at her distress, and kneeled to her, and cried with her.

Not being a girl of steady principle, she went round with the wind. "Dear Zoe," said she: "it is deeper than I thought. La! if you love him, why torment yourself?"

"No," said Zoe; "it is deceit and mystery that torment me. Oh, what shall I do? what shall I do?"

Fanny interpreted this vague exclamation of sorrow as asking advice and said, "I dare not advise you; I can only tell you what I should do in your place. I should make up my mind at once, whether I loved the man or only liked him. If I only liked him, I would turn him up at once."

"Turn him up? what is that?"

"Turn him off, then. If I loved him, I would not let any other woman have the least little bit of a chance to get him. For instance, I would not let him know this old sweetheart of his has won three thousand pounds at least, for I noted her winnings. Diamond cut diamond, my dear. He is concealing from you something or other about him and this Klosking: hide you this one little thing about the Klosking from him—till you get my gentleman safe to England."

"And this is love! I call it warfare."

"And love is warfare, three times out of four. Any way, it is for you to decide, Zoe. I do wish you had never seen the man. He is not what he seems. He is a poor adventurer, and a bundle of deceit."

"You are very hard on him. You don't know all."

"No, nor a quarter; and you know less. There, dear, dry your eyes and fight against it. After all, you know, you are mistress of the situatiou. I'll settle it for you, which way you like."

"You will? Oh, Fanny, you are very good!"

"Say indulgent, please; I'm not good, and never will be, if *I can possibly help.* I despise good people; they are as weak as water. But I do like you, Zoe Vizard, better than any other woman in the world. That is not saying very much: my taste is for men. I think them gods and devils compared with us; and I do admire gods and devils. No

matter, dear. Kiss me and say, 'Fanny, act for me,' and I'll do it."

Zoe kissed her, and then, by a truly virginal impulse, hid her burning face in her hands, and said nothing at all.

Fanny gave her plenty of time and then said kindly, "Well, dear?"

Then Zoe murmured, scarce audibly, "Act—*as if*—I loved him."

And still she kept her face covered with her hands.

Fanny was anything but surprised at this conclusion of the struggle. She said, with a certain alacrity, "Very well, I will: so now bathe your eyes and come in to supper."

"No, no; please go and make an excuse for me."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I won't be told by-and-by I have done wrong. I will do your business, but it shall be in your hearing. Then you can interfere if you choose. Only you had better not put your word in till you see what I am driving at."

With a little more encouragement Zoe was prevailed on to sponge her tearful eyes, and compose herself and join Harrington at supper.

Miss Maitland soon retired, pleading fatigue and packing; and she had not been gone long when Fanny gave her friend a glance and began upon Harrington.

"You are very fond of Mr. Severne, are you not?" said she.

"I am," said Vizard, stoutly preparing for battle. "You are not, perhaps."

Fanny laughed at this prompt pugnacity. "Oh yes, I am," said she: "devoted. But he has a weakness you must own. He is rather fond of gambling."

"He is, I am sorry to say. It is his one fault. Most of us have two or three."

"Don't you think it would be a pity if he was to refuse to go with us to-morrow? was to prefer to stay here and gamble?"

"No fear of that: he has given me his word of honour."

"Still I think it would be hardly safe to tempt him. If you go and tell him that a friend of his won such a lot of money he will want to stop; and if he does not stop, he will go away miserable. You know they began betting with his money, though they went on with their own."

"Oh, did they? What was his own money?"

"How much was it, Zoe?"

"Fifty pounds."

"Well," said Vizard, "you must admit it is hard he should lose his own money. And yet I own I am most anxious to get him away from this place. Indeed I have a project; I want him to rusticate a few months at our place, while I set my lawyer to look into his affairs and see if his estate cannot be cleared. I'll be bound the farms are underlet. What does the admirable Crichton know about such trifles?"

Fanny looked at Zoe, whose colour was rising high at all this. "Well," said she, "when you gentlemen fall in love *with each other*, you certainly are faithful creatures."

"Because we can count on fidelity in return," said Vizard. He thought a little and said, "Well, as to the other thing—you leave it to me. Let us understand one another. Nothing we saw at the gambling-table is to be mentioned by us?"

"No."

"Crichton is to be taken to England for his good?"

"Yes."

"And I am to be grateful to you for your co-operation in this?"

"You can, if you like."

"And you will secure an agreeable companion for the rest of the tour, eh? my diplomatic cousin, and my silent sister?"

"Yes; but it is too bad of you to see through a poor girl, and her little game, like that. I own he is a charming companion."

Fanny's cunning eyes twinkled, and Zoe blushed crimson to see her noble brother manipulated by this artful minx, and then flattered for his perspicacity.

From that moment a revulsion took place in her mind, and pride fought furiously with love—for a time.

This was soon made apparent to Fanny Dover. When they retired, Zoe looked very gloomy, so Fanny asked, rather sharply, "Well, what is the matter now? didn't I do it cleverly?"

"Yes, yes, too cleverly. Oh, Fanny, I begin to revolt against myself."

"This is nice," said Fanny. "Go on, dear. It is just what I ought to have expected. You were there. You had only to interfere. You didn't. And now you are discontented."

"Not with you. Spare me. You are not to blame; and I am very unhappy. I am losing my self-respect. Oh, if this goes on, I shall hate him."

"Yes, dear—for five minutes; and then love him double. Come, don't deceive yourself, and don't torment yourself. All your trouble, we shall leave it behind us to-morrow, and every hour will take us farther from it."

With this practical view of matters she kissed Zoe and hurried to bed.

But Zoe scarcely closed her eyes all night.

Severne did not reach the hotel till past eleven o'clock, and went straight to his own room.

CHAPTER XI

Ashmead accompanied Mademoiselle Klosking to her apartment. It was lighted, and the cloth laid for supper under the chandelier, a snow-white Hamburg damask. Ashmead took the winnings out of his pocket, and proudly piled the gold and crumpled notes in one prodigious mass upon the linen, that shone like satin, and made the gold look doubly inviting. Then he drew back and gloated on it. The Klosking, too, stood and eyed the pile of wealth with amazement and a certain reverence. "Let me count it," said Ashmead. He did so, and it came to four thousand nine hundred and eighty-one pounds, English money. "And to think," said he, "if you had taken my advice you would not have a penny of this!"

"I'll take your advice now," said she. "I will never gamble again."

"Well, take my advice and lock up the swag before a creature sees it. Homburg is full of thieves."

She complied, and took away the money in a napkin.

Ashmead called after her to know might he order supper.

"If you will be so kind."

Ashmead rejoiced at this unguarded permission, and ordered a supper that made Karl stare.

The Klosking returned in about half an hour, clad in a crisp *peignoir*.

Ashmead confronted her. "I have ordered a bottle of champagne," said he. Her answer surprised him. "You have done well. We must now begin to prove the truth of the old proverb, 'Ce que vient par la flûte s'en va au tambour.'"

At supper Mr. Ashmead was the chief drinker, and by a natural consequence, the chief speaker: he held out brilliant prospects; he favoured the Klosking with a discourse on advertising. No talent availed without it; large posters, pictures, window-cards, &c.; but as her talent was superlative, he must now endeavour to keep up with it by invention in his line—the puff circumstantial, the puff poetic, the puff anecdotal, the puff controversial, all tending to blow the fame of the Klosking in every eye and ring it in every ear. "You take my advice," said he, "and devote this money, every penny of it, to Publicity. Don't you touch a single shiner for anything that does not return a hundred per cent. Publicity does, when the article is prime."

"You forget," said she, "this money does not all belong to me. Another can claim half; the gentleman with whom we are in partnership."

Ashmead looked literally blue. "Nonsense!" said he roughly; "he can only claim his fifty pounds."

"Nay, my friend. I took two equal sums—one was his, one mine."

"That has nothing to do with it. He told me to bet for him; I didn't—and I shall take him back his fifty pounds, and say so. I know where to find him."

"Where?"

"That is my business. Don't you go mad now and break my heart."

"Well, my friend, we will talk of it to-morrow morning. It certainly is not very clear; and perhaps, after I have prayed and slept, I may see more plainly what is right."

Ashmead observed she was pale, and asked her, with concern, if she was ill.

"No, not ill," said she, "but worn out. My friend, I knew not at the time how great was my excitement; but now I am conscious that this afternoon I have lived a week. My very knees give way under me."

Upon this admission Ashmead hurried her to bed.

She slept soundly for some hours; but, having once awakened, she fell into a half sleepless state, and was full of dreams and fancies. These preyed on her so, that she rose and despatched a servant to Ashmead, with a line in pencil, begging him to take an early breakfast with her, at nine o'clock.

As soon as ever he came she began upon the topic of last

night. She had thought it over, and said frankly she was not without hopes the gentleman, if he was really a gentleman, might be contented with something less than half. But she really did not see how she could refuse him some share of her winnings, should he demand it. "Think of it," said she. "The poor man loses—£400, I think you said. Then he says, 'Bet you for me,' and goes away, trusting to your honour. His luck changes in my hands. Is he to lose all when he loses, and win nothing when he wins, merely because I am so fortunate as to win much? However, we shall hear what *he* says. You gave him your address."

"I said I was at the 'Golden Star,'" growled Ashmead, in a tone that plainly showed he was vexed with himself for being so communicative.

"Then he will pay us a visit as soon as he hears; so I need give myself no further trouble."

"Why should you? Wait till he comes," said crafty Ashmead.

Ina Klosking coloured. She felt her friend was tempting her; and felt she was not quite beyond the power of temptation.

"What was he like?" said she, to turn the conversation.

"The handsomest young fellow I ever saw."

"Young, of course?"

"Yes, quite a boy; at least he looked a boy. To be sure his talk was not like a boy's; very precocious, I should say."

"What a pity! to begin gambling so young!"

"Oh, he is all right; if he loses every farthing of his own he will marry money. Any woman would have him. You never saw such a curled darling."

"Dark or fair?"

"Fair. Pink and white like a girl: a hand like a lady."

"Indeed! Fine eyes?"

"Splendid."

"What colour?"

"I don't know. Lord bless you! a man does not examine another man's eyes, like you ladies. However, now I think of it, there was one curious thing I should know him by anywhere."

"And what was that?"

"Well, you see, his hair was brown; but just above the forehead he had one lock that was gold itself."

While he said this the Klosking's face underwent the most rapid and striking changes; and at last she sat looking at him wildly.

It was some time before he noticed her, and then he was quite alarmed at her strange expression. "What is the matter?" said he. "Are you ill?"

"No, no, no; only a little—astonished. Such a thing as that is very rare."

"That it is. I never saw a case before."

"Not one, in all your life?" asked she eagerly.

"Well, no; not that I remember."

"Excuse me a minute," said Ina Klosking, and went hurriedly from the room.

Ashmead thought her manner very strange, but concluded she was a little unhinged by yesterday's excitement. Moreover, there faced him an omelet of enormous size, and savoury. He thought this worthy to divide a man's attention even with a great creature's tantrums. He devoted himself to it, and it occupied him so agreeably that he did not observe the conduct of Mademoiselle Klosking on her return. She placed three photographs softly on the table, not very far from him, and then resumed her seat; but her eye never left him: and she gave monosyllabic and almost impatient replies to everything he mumbled with his mouth full of omelet.

When he had done his omelet he noticed the photographs. They were all coloured. He took one up. It was an elderly woman, sweet, venerable, and fair-haired. He looked at Ina and at the photograph, and said, "This is your mother."

"It is."

"It is angelic—as might be expected."

He took up another.

"This is your brother, I suppose. Stop. Hullo!—what is this? Are my eyes making a fool of me?"

He held out the photograph at arm's length, and stared from it to her. "Why, madam," said he, in an awe-struck voice, "this is the gentleman—the player; I'd swear to him."

Ina started from her seat while he spoke. "Ah!" she cried, "I thought so—my Edward!" and sat down, trembling violently.

Ashmead ran to her and sprinkled water in her face, for she seemed ready to faint; but she murmured "No, no,"

and soon the colour rushed into her face, and she clasped her hands together and cried, "I have found him!" and the storm of varying emotions ended in tears that gave her relief.

It was a long time before she spoke; but when she did her spirit and her natural strength of character took the upper hand. "Where is he?" said she firmly.

"He told me he was at the 'Russie.'"

"We will go there at once. When is the next train?"

Ashmead looked at his watch. "In ten minutes. We can hardly do it."

"Yes, we can. Order a carriage this instant. I will be ready in one minute."

They caught the train and started.

As they glided along, Ashmead begged her not to act too hurriedly, and expose herself to insult.

"Who will dare insult me?"

"Nobody, I hope. Still I cannot bear you to go into a strange hotel hunting this man. It is monstrous; but I'm afraid you will not be welcome. Something has just occurred to me; the reason he ran off so sudden was he saw you coming. There was a mirror opposite. Ah, we need not have feared he would come back for his winnings. Idiot—villain!"

"You stab me to the heart," said Ina. "He ran away at sight of me? Ah, Jesu, pity me! What have I done to him?"

Honest Ashmead had much ado not to blubber at this patient cry of anguish, though the woman herself shed no tear just then. But his judgment was undimmed by passion, and he gave her the benefit. "Take my advice," said he, "and work it this way. Come in a close carriage to the side street that is nearest the 'Russie.' I'll go in to the hotel, and ask for him by his name—what is his name?"

"Mr. Edward Severne."

"And say that I was afraid to stake his money; but a friend of mine, that is a bold player, undertook it, and had a great run of luck. 'There is money owing you,' says I, 'and my friend has brought it.' Then he is sure to come. You will have your veil down, I'll open the carriage-door and tell him to jump in, and when you have got him you must make him hear reason. I'll give you a good chance—I'll shut the carriage-door."

CHAPTER XII

Ina smiled at his ingenuity—her first smile that day. "You are indeed a friend," said she. "He fears reproaches; but when he finds he is welcome he will stay with me. And he shall have money to play with, and amuse himself how he likes. I kept too tight a rein on him, poor fellow. My good mother taught me prudence."

"Yes; but," said Ashmead, "you must promise me one thing—not to let him know how much money you have won, and not to go like a goose and give him a lot at once. It never pays to part with power in this wicked world. You give him twenty pounds a day to play with, whenever he is cleaned out. Then the money will last your time, and he will never leave you."

"Oh, how cold-hearted and wise you are!" said she. "But such a humiliating position for *him!*"

"Don't you be silly. You won't keep him any other way."

"I will be as wise as I can," sighed Ina. "I have had a bitter lesson. Only bring him to me, and then who knows? I am a change: my love may revive his, and none of these pitiable precautions may be needed. They would lower us both."

Ashmead groaned aloud. "I see," said he. "He'll soon clean you out. Ah, well! he can't rob you of your voice, and he can't rob you of your Ashmead."

They soon reached Frankfort. Ashmead put her into a carriage as agreed, and went to the "Russie."

Ina sat, with her veil down, in the carriage, and waited Ashmead's return with Severne. He was a long time coming. She began to doubt, and then to fear, and wonder why he was so long.

At last he came in sight.

He was alone.

As he drew nearer she saw his face was thoroughly downcast.

"My dear friend," he faltered, "you are out of luck to-day."

"He will not come with you?"

"Oh, he would come fast enough if he was there; but he is gone."

"Gone! To Homburg?"

"No. Unfortunately he is gone to England. Went off by the fast train an hour ago."

Ina fell back, in silence, just as if she had been struck in the face.

"He is travelling with an English family, and they have gone straight home. Here are their names. I looked in the visitors' book, and talked to the servant, and all. Mr. Vizard, Miss Vizard——"

"Vizard?"

"Yes—Miss Maitland, Miss Dover. See, I wrote them all down."

"Oh, I am unfortunate? Why was I ever born?"

"Don't say that, don't say that. It is annoying; but we shall be able to trace him now. And, besides, I see other ways of getting hold of him."

Ina broke in upon his talk. "Take me to the nearest church," she cried. "Man's words are vain. Ah, Jesu, let me cry to Thee!"

He took her to the nearest church. She went in, and prayed for full two hours. She came out pale and listless, and Ashmead got her home how he could. Her very body seemed all crushed and limp. Ashmead left her, sad at heart himself.

So long as she was in sight Ashmead could think only of her misery. But the moment she was out of sight he remembered the theatre. She was announced for Rosina that very night. He saw trouble of all sorts before him. He ran to the theatre, in great alarm, and told the manager she was taken very ill. He must change the bill.

"Impossible!" was the reply. "If she can't sing, I close."

Ashmead went back to the "Star."

Ina was in her bedroom.

He sent in a line—"Can you sing to-night? If not he says he must close."

The reply came back in rather a trembling hand. "I suffer too much by falsehood to break faith myself. I shall pray till night: and then I shall sing. If I die on the stage, all the better for me."

Was not this a great soul?

CHAPTER XIII

THAT same morning, our English party snatched a hasty breakfast in travelling attire. Severne was not there; but sent word to Vizard he should be there in time.

This filled the cup. Zoe's wounded pride had been rising higher and higher all the night, and she came down rather pale, from broken rest, and sternly resolved. She had a few serious words with Fanny, and sketched her out a little map of conduct, which showed that she had thought the matter well over.

But her plan bade fair to be deranged. Severne was not at the station. Then came a change. Zoe was restless, and cast anxious glances.

But at the second bell he darted into the carriage, as if he had just despatched some wonderful business to get there in time. Whilst the train was starting he busied himself in arranging his things; but, once started, he put on his sunny look, and prepared to be, as usual, the life and soul of the party.

But for once he met a frost. Zoe was wrapped in impenetrable hauteur, and Fanny in polite indifference. Never was loss of favour more ably marked, without the least ill-breeding, and no good handle given to seek an explanation.

No doubt a straightforward man, with justice on his side, would have asked them plump whether he had been so unfortunate as to offend, and how; and this was what Zoe secretly wished, however she might seem to repel it. But Severne was too crafty for that. He had learned the art of waiting.

After a few efforts at conversation, and smooth rebuffs, he put on a surprised, mortified, and sorrowful air, and awaited the attack, which he felt would come soon or late.

This skilful inertia baffled the fair, in a man; in a woman, they might have expected it; and after a few hours, Zoe's patience began to wear out.

The train stopped for twenty minutes, and even while they were snatching a little refreshment, the dark locks and the blonde came very close together; and Zoe, exasperated by her own wounded pride and the sullen torpor of her lover, gave Fanny fresh instructions, which nobody was better

qualified to carry out than that young lady, as nobody was better able to baffle female strategy than the gentleman.

This time, however, the ladies had certain advantages to balance his subtlety, and his habit of stating anything true or false that suited his immediate purpose.

They opened very cat-like. Fanny affected to be outgrowing her ill-humour, and volunteered a civil word or two to Severne. Thereupon Zoe turned sharply away from Fanny, as if she disapproved her conduct, and took a book. This was pretty sly, and done, I suppose, to remove all idea of concert between the fair assailants; whereas it was a secret signal for the concert to come into operation, it being Fanny's part to play upon Severne, and Zoe's to watch, from her corner, every lineament of his face under fire.

"By the way, Mr. Severne," said Fanny, apropos of a church on a hill they were admiring, "did you get your winnings?"

"My winnings! You are sarcastical."

"Am I? Really I did not intend to be."

"No, no; forgive me. But that did seem a little cruel. Miss Dover, I was a heavy loser."

"Not whilst we were there. The lady and gentleman who played with your money won, oh, such a deal!"

"The devil they did!"

"Yes: did you not stay behind last night to get it? We never saw you at the 'Russie.'"

"I was very ill."

"Bleeding at the nose?"

"No; that always relieves me when it comes. I am subject to fainting fits. Once I lay insensible so long they were going to bury me. Now do pray tell me what makes you fancy anybody won a lot with my money."

"Well, I will. You know you left fifty pounds for a friend to bet with."

Severne stared; but was too eager for information to question her how she knew this. "Yes, I did," said he.

"And you really don't know what followed?"

"Good heavens! how can I?"

"Well, then, as you ran out—to faint, Mademoiselle Klosking came in, just as she did at the opera, you know, the time before when you ran out—to bleed. She slipped into your chair the very moment you left it; and your friend with the flaming neck-tie told her you had set him to bet with your money. By-the-bye, Mr. Severne, how on earth do you and

Mademoiselle Klosking, who have both so much taste in dress, come to have a mutual friend, vulgarity in person, with a velveteen coat and an impossible neck-tie?"

"What are you talking about, Miss Dover? I do just know Mademoiselle Klosking; I met her in society in Vienna two years ago; and that cad I commissioned to bet for me, I never saw before in my life. You are keeping me on tenter-hooks. My money—my money—my money! If you have a heart in your bosom, tell me what became of my money."

He was violent for the first time since they had known him, and his eyes flashed fire.

"Well," said Fanny, beginning to be puzzled and rather frightened, "this man, who you *say* was a new acquaintance——"

"Whom I *say?* Do you mean to tell me I am a liar?" He fumbled eagerly in his breast pocket, and produced a card. "There," said he, "this is the card he gave me, 'Mr. Joseph Ashmead.' Now may this train dash over the next viaduct, and take you and Miss Vizard to heaven, and me to hell, if ever I saw Mr. Joseph Ashmead's face before. THE MONEY!—THE MONEY!"

He uttered this furiously; and it is a curious fact, but Zoe turned red, and Fanny pale. It was really in quite a cowed voice Miss Dover went on to say, "La! don't fly out like that. Well, then, the man refused to bet with your money; so then Mademoiselle Klosking said she would; and she played—oh, how she did play! She doubled, and doubled, and doubled, hundreds upon hundreds. She made a mountain of gold and a pyramid of bank-notes; and she never stopped till she broke the bank—there!"

"With my money?" gasped Severne.

"Yes, with your money. Your friend with the loud tie pocketed it; I beg your pardon, not your friend—only hers. Harrington says he is her *cher ami.*"

"The money is mine!" he shrieked. "I don't care who played with it, it is mine. And the fellow had the impudence to send me back my £50 to the 'Russie.'" *

"What! you gave him your address?" This with an involuntary glance of surprise at Zoe.

"Of course. Do you think I leave a man £50 to play with and don't give him my address? He has won thou-

* I think I see Vizard's hand in this.

sands with my money, and sent me back my fifty, for a blind, the thief!"

"Well, really it is too bad," said Fanny. "But there—I'm afraid you must make the best of it. Of course their sending back your £50 shows they mean to keep their winnings."

"You talk like a woman," said he; then, grinding his teeth, and stretching out a long muscular arm, he said, "I'll take the blackguard by the throat and tear it out of him, though I tear his life out along with it."

All this time Zoe had been looking at him with concern and even with admiration. He seemed more beautiful than ever, to her, under the influence of passion, and more of a man.

"Mr. Severne," said she, "be calm. Fanny has misled you without intending it. She did not hear all that passed between those two; I did. The velveteen and neck-tie man refused to bet with your money. It was Mademoiselle Klosking who betted, and with her own money. She took £25 of her own, and £25 of yours, and won two or three hundred in a few moments. Surely, as a gentleman, you cannot ask a lady to do more than repay you your £25."

Severne was a little cowed by Zoe's interference. He stood his ground; but sullenly instead of violently.

"Miss Vizard, if I was weak enough to trust a lady with my money at a gambling-table I should expect foul play; for I never knew a lady yet who would not cheat *at cards*, if she could. I trusted my money to a tradesman to bet with. If he takes a female partner, that is no business of mine; he is responsible all the same, and I'll have my money."

He jumped up at the word and looked out at the window: he even fumbled with the door, and tried to open it.

"You had better jump out," said Fanny.

"And then they would keep my money for good. No," said he; "I'll wait for the nearest station." He sank back into his seat, looking unutterable things.

Fanny looked rather rueful at first; then she said spitefully, "You must be very sure of your influence with your old sweetheart. You forget she has got another now: a tradesman, too. He will cling to the money, and make her cling to it. Their sending the £50 shows that."

Zoe's eyes were on him with microscopic power, and with all his self-command she saw him wince and change colour,

and give other signs that this shaft had told in many ways.

He shut his countenance the next moment; but it had opened, and Zoe was on fire with jealousy and suspicion.

Fluctuating Fanny regretted the turn things had taken. She did not want to lose a pleasant male companion, and she felt sure Zoe would be unhappy, and cross to her, if he went. "Surely, Mr. Severne," she said, "you will not desert us, and go back for so small a chance. Why, we are a hundred and fifty miles from Homburg, and all the nearer to dear old England. There, there—we must be kinder to you, and make you forget this misfortune."

Thus spoke the trimmer. The reply took her by surprise.

"And whose fault is it that I am obliged to get out a hundred and fifty miles from Homburg? You knew all this. You could have got me a delay of a few hours to go and get my due. You know I am a poor man. With all your cleverness, you don't know what made me poor, or you would feel some remorse, perhaps; but you know I am poor when most I could wish I was rich. You have heard that old woman there fling my poverty in my teeth; yet you could keep this from me—just to assist a cheat and play upon the feelings of a friend. Now, what good has that done you, to inflict misery on me in sport, on a man who never gave you a moment's pain if he could help it?"

Fanny looked ruefully this way and that, her face began to work, and she laid down her arms, if a lady can be said to do that, who lays down a strong weapon and takes up a stronger; in other words, she burst out crying, and said no more. You see she was poor herself.

Severne took no notice of her; he was accustomed to make women cry. He thrust his head out of the window in hopes of seeing a station near, and his whole being was restless as if he would like to jump out.

While he was in this condition of mind and body, the hand he had once kissed so tenderly, and shocked Miss Maitland, passed an envelope over his shoulder, with two lines written on it in pencil:

"If you GO BACK TO HOMBURG, oblige ME BY REMAINING there."

This demands an explanation, but it shall be brief.

Fanny's shrewd hint, that the money could only be

obtained from Mademoiselle Klosking, had pierced Zoe through and through. Her mind grasped all that had happened, all that impended, and wisely declining to try and account for or reconcile all the jarring details, she settled, with a woman's broad instinct, that somehow or other his going back to Homburg meant going back to Mademoiselle Klosking. Whether that lady would buy him or not, she did not know. But going back to her meant going a journey to see a rival, with consequences illimitable.

She had courage; she had pride; she had jealousy. She resolved to lose her lover, or have him all to herself. Share him she would not, nor even endure the torture of the doubt.

She took an envelope out of her satchel, and with the pencil attached to her *chatelaine*, wrote the fatal words, "If you go back to Homburg, oblige me by remaining there."

At this moment she was not goaded by pique, nor any petty feeling. Indeed, his reproach to Fanny had touched her a little; and it was with the tear in her eye she came to the resolution, and handed him that line, which told him she knew her value, and, cost what it might, would part with any man for ever rather than share him with the Klosking or any other woman.

Severne took the line, eyed it, realised it, fell back from the window, and dropped into his seat. This gave Zoe a consoling sense of power. She had seen her lover raging and restless, and wanting to jump out, yet now beheld him literally felled with a word from her hand.

He leaned his head in his hand in a sort of broken-down, collapsed, dogged way that moved her pity, though hardly her respect.

By-and-by it struck her as a very grave thing that he did not reply by word, nor even by look. He could decide with a glance, and why did he hesitate? Was he really balancing her against Mademoiselle Klosking weighted with a share of his winnings?

This doubt was wormwood to her pride and self-respect; but his crushed attitude allayed in some degree the mere irritation his doubt caused.

The minutes passed, and the miles: still that broken figure sat before her, with his face hidden by his white hand.

Zoe's courage began to falter. Misgivings seized her. She had made that a matter of love which, after all, to a man, might be a mere matter of business. He was poor,

too, and she had thrust her jealousy between him and money. He might have his pride too, and rebel against her affront.

As for his thoughts, under that crushed exterior, which he put on for a blind, they were so deliberate and calculating, that I shall not mix them on this page with that pure and generous creature's. Another time will do to reveal his sordid arithmetic.

As for Zoe, she settled down into wishing, with all her heart, she had not submitted her lover so imperiously to a test the severity of which she now saw she had underrated.

Presently the speed of the train began to slacken—all too soon. She now dreaded to learn her fate. Was she, or was she not, worth a few thousand pounds ready money?

A signal-post was passed, proving that they were about to enter a station. Yet another. Now the wheels were hardly turning. Now the platform was visible. Yet he never moved his white, delicate, womanish fingers from his forehead, but remained still absorbed, and looked undecided.

At last the motion entirely ceased. Then, as she turned her head to glean, if possible, the name of the place, he stole a furtive glance at her. She was pallid, agitated: he resolved upon his course.

As soon as the train stopped he opened the door and jumped out, without a word to Zoe, or even a look.

Zoe turned pale as death. "I have lost him," said she.

"No, no," cried Fanny. "See, he has not taken his cane and umbrella."

"*They* will not keep him from flying to his money and her," moaned Zoe. "Did you not see? He never once looked at me. He could not. I am sick at heart."

This set Fanny fluttering. "There, let me out to speak to him."

"Sit quiet," said Zoe sternly.

"No, no. If you love him——"

"I do love him—passionately. And *therefore* I'll die rather than share him with any one."

"But it is dreadful to be fixed here, and not allowed to move hand or foot."

"It is the lot of women. Let me feel the hand of a friend, that is all; for I am sick at heart."

Fanny gave her hand, and all the sympathy her shallow nature had to bestow.

Zoe sat motionless, gripping her friend's hand almost convulsively, a statue of female fortitude.

This suspense could not last long. The officials ordered the travellers to the carriages; doors were opened and slammed; the engine gave a snort, and only at that moment did Mr. Edward Severne tear the door open and bolt into the carriage.

Oh, it was pitiable but lovely to see the blood rush into Zoe's face, and the fire into her eye, and the sweet mouth expand in a smile of joy and triumph.

She sat a moment, almost paralysed with pleasure, and then cast her eyes down, lest their fire should proclaim her feelings too plainly.

As for Severne, he only glanced at her as he came in, and then shunned her eye. He presented to her the grave, resolved countenance of a man who has been forced to a decision, but means to abide by it.

In reality he was delighted at the turn things had taken. The money was not necessarily lost, since he knew where it was; and Zoe had compromised herself beyond retreating. He intended to wear this anxious face a long while. But his artificial snow had to melt, so real a sun shone full on it. The moment he looked full at Zoe, she repaid him with such a point-blank beam of glorious tenderness and gratitude, as made him thrill with passion as well as triumph. He felt her whole heart was his, and from that hour his poverty would never be allowed to weigh with her. He cleared up, and left off acting, because it was superfluous; he had now only to bask in sunshine. Zoe, always tender, but coy till this moment, made love to him like a young goddess. Even Fanny yielded to the solid proof of sincerity he had given, and was downright affectionate.

He was king. And from one gradation to another, they entered Cologne with Severne seated between the two girls, each with a hand in his, and a great disposition to pet and spoil him. More than once, indeed, a delicate head just grazed each of his square shoulders; but candour compels me to own that their fatigue, and the yawing of the carriage at the time, were more to blame than the tired girls; for at the enormity there was a prompt retirement to a distance. Miss Maitland was in the next compartment fast asleep; and Vizard, from the first, had preferred male companions and tobacco.

At Cologne they visited the pride of Germany, that mighty cathedral which the middle ages projected, commenced, and left to decay of old age before completion, and our enterprising age will finish; but went on the same day.

Before they reached England, the love-making between Severne and Zoe, though it never passed the bounds of good taste, was so apparent to any female eye, that Miss Maitland remonstrated severely with Fanny.

But the trimmer was now won to the other side. She would not offend Aunt Maitland by owning her conversion. She said hypocritically, "I am afraid it is no use objecting at present, aunt. The attachment is too strong on both sides. And whether he is poor or not, he has sacrificed his money to her feelings, and so, now, she feels bound in honour. I know her; she won't listen to a word now, aunt: why irritate her? She would quarrel with both of us in a moment."

"Poor girl!" said Miss Maitland; and took the hint. She had still an arrow in her quiver—Vizard.

In mid-channel, ten miles south of Dover, she caught him in a lucid interval of non-smoke. She reminded him he had promised her to give Mr. Severne a hint about Zoe.

"So I did," said he.

"And have you?"

"Well, no; to tell the truth, I forgot."

"Then please do it now; for they are going on worse than ever."

"I'll warn the fool," said he.

He did warn him, and in the following terms:

"Look here, old fellow. I hear you are—hum—paying a good deal of attention to my sister Zoe."

No answer. Severne on his guard.

"Now you had better mind your eye. She is a very pretty girl, and you may find yourself entangled before you know where you are."

Severne hung his head. "Of course I know it is great presumption in me."

"Presumption?—fiddlestick! Such a man as you are ought not to be tied to any woman, or, if you must be, you ought not to go cheap. Mind, Zoe is a poor girl; only ten thousand in the world. Flirt with who you like; there is no harm in that; but don't get seriously entangled with any of them. Good sisters, and good daughters, and good flirts make bad wives."

"Oh, then," said Severne, "it is only on her account you object."

"Well, principally. And I don't exactly object; I warn. In the first place, as soon as ever we get into Barfordshire

she will most likely jilt you. You may be only her Continental lover. How can I tell, *or you either?* And if not, and you were to be weak enough to marry her, she would develop unexpected vices directly—they all do; and you are not rich enough to live in a house of your own, you would have to live in mine—a fine fate for a rising blade like you."

"What a terrible prospect! to be tied to the best friend in England, as well as the loveliest woman."

"Oh, if that is the view you take," said Vizard, beaming with delight, "it is no use talking reason to *you*."

When they reached London, Vizard gave Miss Maitland an outline of this conversation; and so far from seeing the humour of it—which, nevertheless, was pretty strong, and characteristic of the man and his one foible—she took the huff, and would not even stay to dinner at the hotel. She would go into her own county by the next train, bag and baggage.

Mr. Severne was the only one who offered to accompany her to the Great Western Railway. She declined. He insisted; went with her; got her ticket, numbered and arranged her packages, and saw her safely off, with an air of profound respect and admirably-feigned regret.

That she was the dupe of his art may be doubted: that he lost nothing by it is certain. Men are not ruined by civility. As soon as she was seated she said, "I beg, sir, you will waste no more time with me. Mr. Severne, you have behaved to me like a gentleman, and that is very unusual in a man of your age now-a-days. I cannot alter my opinion about my niece and you; but I *am* sorry you are a poor gentleman—much too poor to marry her—and I wish I could make you a rich one; but I cannot. There is my hand."

You should have seen the air of tender veneration with which the young Machiavel bowed over her hand, and even imprinted a light touch on it with his smooth lips.

Then he retired, disconsolate, and once out of sight, whipped into a gin-palace and swallowed a quartern of neat brandy, to take the taste out of his mouth, as he pretended. "Go it, Ned," said he to himself; "you can't afford to make enemies."

The old lady went off bitter against the whole party *except Mr. Severne;* and he retired to his friends, disembarrassed of the one foe he had not turned into a downright friend, but

only disarmed. Well does the great Voltaire recommend what he well calls "le grand art de plaire."

Vizard sent Harris into Barfordshire to prepare for the comfort of the party, and to light fires in all the bedrooms, though it was summer, and to see the beds, blankets, and sheets aired at the very fires of the very rooms they were to be used in. This sacred office he never trusted to a housekeeper: he used even to declare, as the result of experience, that it was beyond the intellect of any woman really to air mattresses, blankets, and sheets—all three. He had also a printed list he used to show about of five acquaintances, stout fellows all, whom "little bits of women" (such was his phraseology) had laid low with damp beds, having crippled two for life with rheumatism and lumbago, and sent three to their long home.

Meantime Severne took the ladies to every public attraction by day and night; and Vizard thanked him, before the fair, for his consideration in taking them off his hand; and Severne retorted by thanking him for leaving them on his.

It may seem, at first, a vile selection; but I am going to ask the ladies, who honour me with their attention, to follow, not that gay amorous party of three, but this solitary cynic on his round.

Taking a turn round the garden in Leicester Square, which was new to him, Harrington Vizard's observant eye saw a young lady rise up from a seat, to go, but turn pale directly, and sit down again upon the arm of the seat as if for support.

"Hollo!" said Vizard, in his blunt way, "*you* are not well. What can I do for you?"

"I am all right," said she; "please go on"—the latter words in a tone that implied she was not a novice, and the attentions of gentlemen to strange ladies were suspected.

"I beg your pardon," said Vizard coolly. "You are not all right. You look as if you were going to faint."

"What, are my lips blue?"

"No; but they are pale."

"Well, then, it is not a case of fainting. It *may* be exhaustion."

"You know best. What shall we do?"

"Why, nothing. Yes; mind our own business."

"With all my heart; my business just now is to offer you some restorative—a glass of wine."

"Oh yes! The idea of me going into a public-house with you! Besides, I don't believe in stimulants. Strength can only enter the human body one way. I know what is the matter with me."

"What is it?"

"I am not obliged to tell *you*."

"Of course you are not obliged; but you might as well."

"Well, then, it is Hunger."

"Hunger!"

"Hunger—famine—starvation. Don't you know English?"

"I hope you are not serious, madam," said Vizard, very gravely. "However, if ladies will say such things as that, men with stomachs in their bosoms must act accordingly. Oblige me by taking my arm, as you are weak, and we will adjourn to that eating-house over the way."

"Much obliged," said the lady satirically; "our acquaintance is not *quite* long enough for that."

He looked at her; a tall, slim young lady—black merino, by no means new, clean cuffs and collar, leaning against the chair for support, and yet sacrificing herself to conventional propriety, and even withstanding him with a pretty little air of defiance that was pitiable, her pallor and the weakness of her body considered.

The poor woman-hater's bowels began to yearn. "Look here, you little spitfire," said he; "if you don't instantly take my arm, I'll catch you up and carry you over with no more trouble than you would carry a thread-paper."

She looked him up and down very keenly, and at last with a slight expression of feminine approval, the first she had vouchsafed him. Then she folded her arms, and levelled her little nose at him like a bayonet. "You daren't. I'll call the police."

"If you do, I'll tell them you are my little cousin, mad as a March hare: starving, and won't eat. Come, how is it to be?" He advanced upon her.

"You can't be in earnest, sir," said she, with sudden dignity.

"Am I not, though? You don't know *me*. I am used to be obeyed. If you don't go with me like a sensible girl, I'll carry you—to your dinner—like a ruffian."

"Then I'll go—like a lady," said she, with sudden humility.

He offered her his arm. She passed hers within; but leaned as lightly as possible on it, and her poor pale face was a little pink as they went.

He entered the eating-house and asked for two portions of cold roast beef, not to keep her waiting. They were brought.

"Sir," said she, with a subjugated air, "will you be so good as cut up the meat small, and pass it to me a bit or two at a time?"

He was surprised, but obeyed her orders.

"And if you could make me talk a little? Because, at sight of the meat so near me, I feel like a tigress—poor human nature! Sir, I have not eaten meat for a week, nor food of any kind this two days."

"Good God!"

"So I must be prudent. People have gorged themselves with furious eating under those circumstances; that is why I asked you to supply me slowly. Thank you. You need not look at me like that. Better folk than I have *died* of hunger. Something tells me I have reached the lowest spoke when I have been indebted to a stranger for a meal."

Vizard felt the water come into his eyes; but he resisted that pitiable weakness. "Bother that nonsense!" said he. "I'll introduce myself, and then you can't throw *stranger* in my teeth. I am Harrington Vizard, a Barfordshire squire."

"I thought you were not a Cockney."

"Lord forbid! Does that information entitle me to any in return?"

"I don't know; but, whether or no, my name is Rhoda Gale."

"Have another plate, Miss Gale?"

"Thanks."

He ordered another.

"I am proud of your confiding your name to me, Miss Gale; but, to tell the truth, what I wanted to know is how a young lady of your talent and education could be so badly off as you must be. It is not impertinent curiosity."

The young lady reflected a moment. "Sir," said she, "I don't think it is; and I would not much mind telling you. Of course I studied you before I came here. Even hunger would not make me sit in a tavern beside a fool, or a snob, or —(with a faint blush)—a libertine. But to tell one's own story, that is so egotistical, for one thing."

"Oh, it is never egotistical to oblige."

"Now that is sophistical. Then, again, I am afraid I could not tell it to you without crying, because you seem rather a

manly man, and some of it might revolt you, and you might sympathise right out, and then I should break down."

"No matter: do us both good."

"Yes, but before the waiters and people! See how they are staring at us already!"

"We will have another go in at the beef, and then adjourn to the garden for your narrative."

"No; as much garden as you like, but no more beef. I have eaten one sirloin, I reckon. Will you give me one cup of black tea without sugar or milk."

Vizard gave the order.

She seemed to think some explanation necessary, though he did not.

"One cup of tea agrees with my brain and nerves," said she. "It steadies them. That is a matter of individual experience. I should not prescribe it to others any the more for that."

Vizard sat wondering at the girl. He said to himself, "What is she? a *lusus naturæ?*"

When the tea came, and she had sipped a little, she perked up wonderfully. Said she, "Oh, the magic effect of food eaten judiciously! Now I am a lioness, and do not fear the future. Yes, I will tell you my story—and if you think you are going to hear a love-story, you will be finely disappointed. No, *sir,*" said she, with rising fervour and heightened colour, "you will hear a story the public is deeply interested in and does not know it; ay, a story that will certainly be referred to with wonder and shame whenever civilisation shall become a reality, and law cease to be a tool of injustice and monopoly." She paused a moment: then said, a little doggedly, as one used to encounter prejudice, "I am a medical student; a would-be doctor."

"Ah!"

"And so well qualified by genuine gifts, by study from my infancy, by zeal, quick senses, and cultivated judgment, that, were all the leading London physicians examined to-morrow by qualified persons at the same board as myself, most of those worthy practitioners—not all, mind you—would cut an indifferent figure in modern science compared with me, whom you have had to rescue from starvation—because I am a woman."

Her eye flashed. But she moderated herself and said, "That is the outline; and it is a grievance. Now grievances are bores. You can escape this one before it is too late."

"If it lies with me, I demand the minutest details," said Vizard warmly.

"You shall have them; and true to the letter."

Vizard settled the small account, and adjourned with his companion to the garden. She walked by his side, with her face sometimes thoughtfully bent on the ground, and sometimes confronting him with ardour, and told him a true story, the simplicity of which I shall try not to spoil with any vulgar arts of fiction.

A LITTLE NARRATIVE OF DRY FACTS TOLD TO A WOMAN-HATER, BY A WOMAN.

CHAPTER XIV

"My father was an American, my mother English. I was born near Epsom, and lived there ten years. Then my father had property left him in Massachusetts, and we went to Boston. Both my parents educated me, and began very early. I observe that most parents are babies at teaching, compared with mine. My father was a linguist, and taught me to lisp German, French, and English; my mother was an ideal woman; she taught me three rarities—attention, observation, and accuracy. If I went a walk in the country, I had to bring her home a budget; the men and women on the road, their dresses, appearance, countenances, and words; every kind of bird in the air, and insect and chrysalis in the hedges; the crops in the fields, the flowers and herbs on the banks. If I walked in the town, I must not be eyes and no eyes: woe betide me if I could only report the dresses. Really, I have known me, when I was but eight, come home to my mother laden with details, when perhaps an untrained girl of eighteen could only have specified that she had gone up and down a thoroughfare. Another time mother would take me on a visit: next day, or perhaps next week, she would expect me to describe every article of furniture in her friend's room, and the books on the table, and repeat the conversation, the topics, at all events. She taught me to master history *accurately*. To do this she was artful enough to turn sport into science. She utilised a game: young people in Boston play it. A

writes an anecdote on paper, or perhaps produces it in print. She reads it off to B. B goes away, and writes it down by memory; then reads her writing out to C. C has to listen, and convey her impression to paper. This she reads to D, and D goes and writes it. Then the original story and D's version are compared; and generally speaking, the difference of the two is a caution—against oral tradition. When the steps of deviation are observed, it is quite a study.

"My mother, with her good wit, saw there was something better than fun to be got out of this. She trained my memory of great things with it. She began with striking passages of history and played the game with father and me. But as my power of retaining, and repeating correctly, grew by practice, she enlarged the business, and kept enriching my memory, so that I began to have tracts of history at my fingers' ends. As I grew older, she extended the sport to laws and the great public controversies in religion, politics, and philosophy that have agitated the world. But here she had to get assistance from her learned friends. She was a woman valued by men of intellect, and she had no mercy—milked jurists, physicians, and theologians, and historians, all into my little pail. To be sure, they were as kind about it as she was unscrupulous. They saw I was a keen student, and gave my mother many a little gem in writing. She read them out to me: I listened hard, and thus I fixed many great and good things in my trained memory; and repeated them against the text: I was never allowed to see *that.*

"With this sharp training, school subjects were child's play to me, and I won a good many prizes very easily. My mother would not let me waste a single minute over music. She used to say, 'Music extracts what little brains a girl has. Open the piano, you shut the understanding.' I am afraid I bore you with my mother."

"Not at all, not at all. I admire her."

"Oh, thank you—thank you, sir. She never uses big words; so it is only of late I have had the *nous* to see how wise she is: she corrected the special blots of the female character in me; and it is sweet to me to talk of that dear friend. What would I give to see her here!"

"Well, then, sir, she made me, as far as she could, a—what shall I say?—a kind of little intellectual gymnast, fit to begin any study; but she left me to choose my own line.

Well, I was for natural history first; began like a girl; gathered wild flowers and simples at Epsom, along with an old woman: she discoursed on their traditional virtues, and knew little of their real properties; *that* I have discovered since.

"From herbs to living things; never spared a chrysalis, but always took it home, and watched it break into wings. Hung over the ponds in June, watching the eggs of the frog turn to tadpoles, and the tadpoles to Johnny Crapaud. I obeyed Scripture in one thing, for I studied the ants and their ways.

"I collected birds' eggs. At nine, not a boy in the parish could find more nests in a day than I could. With birds'-nesting, buying, and now and then begging, I made a collection that figures in a museum over the water, and is entitled, 'Eggs of British Birds.' The colours attract, and people always stop at it. But it does no justice whatever to the great variety of sea-birds' eggs on the coast of Britain.

"When I had learned what little they teach in schools, especially drawing, and that is useful in scientific pursuits, I was allowed to choose my own books, and attend lectures. One blessed day I sat and listened to Agassiz — ah! No tragedy well played, nor opera sung, ever moved a heart so deeply as he moved mine, that great and earnest man, whose enthusiasm for nature was as fresh as my own, and his knowledge a thousand times larger. Talk of heaven opening to the Christian pilgrim as he passes Jordan! Why, God made earth as well as heaven, and it is worthy of the Architect; and it is a joy divine when earth opens to the true admirer of God's works. Sir, earth opened to me, as Agassiz discoursed.

"I followed him about like a little bloodhound, and dived into the libraries after each subject he treated or touched.

"It was another little epoch in my life when I read White's letters to Pennant about natural history in Selborne. Selborne is an English village, not half so pretty as most; and until Gilbert White came, nobody saw anything there worth printing. His book showed me that the humblest spot in nature becomes extraordinary the moment extraordinary observation is applied to it. I must mimic Gilbert White directly. I pestered my poor parents to spend a month or two in the depths of the country, on the verge of a forest. They yielded, with groans; I kissed them, and we rusticated. I pried into every living thing, not forgetting my old friends the insect tribe. Here I found ants with grander ideas than

they have to home, and satisfied myself they have more brains than apes. They co-operate more, and in complicated things. Sir, there are ants that make greater marches, for their size, than Napoleon's invasion of Russia. Even the less nomad tribes will march through fields of grass, where each blade is a high gum-tree to them, and never lose the track. I saw an army of red ants, with generals, captains, and ensigns, start at daybreak, march across a road, through a hedge, and then through high grass till noon, and surprise a fortification of black ants and take it after a sanguinary resistance. All that must have been planned beforehand, you know, and carried out to the letter. Once I found a colony busy on some hard ground, preparing an abode. I happened to have been microscoping a wasp, so I threw him down among the ants. They were disgusted. They ran about collecting opinions. Presently half of them burrowed into the earth below and undermined him, till he lay on a crust of earth as thin as a wafer and a deep grave below. Then they all got on him except one, and he stood pompous on a pebble and gave orders. The earth broke — the wasp went down into his grave—and the ants soon covered him with loose earth, and resumed their domestic architecture. I concluded that though the monkey resembles man most in body, the ant comes nearer him in mind. As for dogs, I don't know where to rank them in *nature,* because they have been pupils of man for centuries. I bore you ?"

"No."

"Oh yes, I do: an enthusiast is always a bore. 'Les Fâcheux' of Molière are only enthusiasts. Well, sir, in one word, I was a natural philosopher—very small, but earnest; and, in due course, my studies brought me to the wonders of the human body. I studied the outlines of anatomy in books and plates, and prepared figures; and from that, by degrees, I was led on to surgery and medicine—in books, you understand; and they are only half the battle. Medicine is a thing one can do; it is a noble science, a practical science, and a subtle science, where I thought my powers of study and observation might help me to be keen at reading symptoms, and do good to man, and be a famous woman; so I concluded to benefit mankind and myself. Stop! that sounds like self-deception. It must have been myself and mankind I concluded to benefit. Any way, I pestered that small section of mankind, which consisted of my parents, until they consented to let me study medicine in Europe."

"What! all by yourself?"

"Yes. Oh, girls are very independent in the States, and govern the old people. Mine said 'No' a few dozen times; but they were bound to end in 'Yes,' and I went to Zurich. I studied hard there, and earned the approbation of the professors; but the school deteriorated; too many ladies poured in from Russia; some were not in earnest, and preferred flirting to study, and did themselves no good, and made the male students idle and wickeder than ever—if possible."

"What else could you expect?" said Vizard.

"Nothing else from *unpicked* women. But when all the schools in Europe shall be open—as they ought to be, and must, and shall—there will be no danger of shallow girls crowding to any particular school. Besides, there will be a more strict and rapid routine of examination then to sift out the female flirts—and the male dunces along with them, I hope.

"Well, sir, we few, that really meant medicine, made inquiries, and heard of a famous old school in the south of France, where women had graduated of old; and two of us went there to try—an Italian lady and myself. We carried good testimonials from Zurich; and not to frighten the Frenchmen at starting, I attacked them alone. Cornelia was my elder, and my superior in attainments. She was a true descendant of those learned ladies who have adorned the chairs of philosophy, jurisprudence, anatomy, and medicine in her native country; but she has the wisdom of the serpent as well as of the sage, and she put me forward because of my red hair. She said that would be a passport to the dark philosophers of France."

"Was not that rather foxy, Miss Gale?"

"Foxy as my hair itself, Mr. Vizard."

"Well, I applied to a professor. He received me with profound courtesy and feigned respect, but was staggered at my request to matriculate. He gesticulated and bowed *à la française,* and begged the *permission* of his foxy-haired invader from northern climes to consult his colleagues. Would I do him the great honour to call again next day at twelve? I did, and met three other polished authorities. One spoke for all, and said: If I had not brought with me proofs of serious study, they should have dissuaded me very earnestly from a science I could not graduate in without going through practical courses of anatomy and clinical surgery. That, however (with a regular French shrug),

was my business, not theirs. It was not for them to teach me delicacy, but rather to learn it from me. That was a French sneer. The French are *un gens moqueur,* you know. I received both shrug and sneer like marble. He ended it all by saying: The school had no written law excluding doctresses; and the old records proved women had graduated, and even lectured, there. I had only to pay my fees, and enter upon my routine of studies. So I was admitted on sufferance; but I soon earned the good opinion of the professors, and of this one in particular: and then Cornelia applied for admission, and was let in too. We lived together, and had no secrets; and I think, sir, I may venture to say that we showed some little wisdom, if you consider our age, and all that was done to spoil us. As to parrying their little sly attempts at flirtation, that is nothing; we came prepared: but, when our fellow students found we were in earnest, and had high views, the chivalrous spirit of a gallant nation took fire, and they treated us with a delicate reverence that might have turned any woman's head. But we had the credit of a sneered-at sex to keep up, and felt our danger, and warned each other; and I remember I told Cornelia how many young ladies in the States I had seen puffed up by the men's extravagant homage, and become spoiled children, and offensively arrogant and discourteous, so I begged her to check those vices in me the moment she saw them coming.

"When we had been here a year, attending all the lectures—clinical medicine and surgery included—news came that one British school, Edinburgh, had shown symptoms of yielding to Continental civilisation, and relaxing monopoly. That turned me north directly. My mother is English: I wanted to be a British doctress, not a French. Cornelia had misgivings, and even condescended to cry over me. But I am a mule, and always was. Then that dear friend made terms with me; I must not break off my connection with the French school, she said. No; she had thought it well over: I must ask leave of the French professors to study in the north, and bring back notes about those distant Thulians. Says she, 'Your studies in that savage island will be allowed to go for something here, if you improve your time; and you will be sure to, sweetheart, that I may be always proud of you.' Dear Cornelia!"

"Am I to believe all this?" said Vizard. "Can women be such true friends?"

"What cannot women be? What!! are you one of those who take us for *a clique?* Don't you know that more than half mankind are women?"

"Alas!"

"Alas for them!" said Rhoda sharply.

"Well, well," said Vizard, putting on sudden humility, "don't let us quarrel. I hate quarrelling—where I'm sure to get the worst. Ay, friendship is a fine thing, in men or women; a far nobler sentiment than love. You will not admit that, of course, being a woman."

"Oh yes, I will," said she. "Why, I have observed love attentively; and I pronounce it a fever of the mind. It disturbs the judgment and perverts the conscience. You side with the beloved, right or wrong. What personal degradation! I observe, too, that a grand passion is a grand misfortune; they are always in a storm of hope, fears, doubt, jealousy, rapture, rage, and the end deceit, or else satiety. Friendship is steady and peaceful; not much jealousy, no heart-burnings. It strengthens with time, and survives the smallpox, and a wooden leg. It doubles our joys and divides our grief, and lights and warms our lives with a steady flame. *Solem e mundo tollunt, qui tollunt amicitiam.*"

"Hullo!" cried Vizard. "What! you know Latin too?"

"Why, of course — a smattering; or how could I read Pliny, and Celsus, and ever so much more rubbish, that custom chucks down before the gates of knowledge and says, 'There—before you go the right road, you ought to go the wrong; *it is usual*'? Study now, with the reverence they don't deserve, and non-observers of antiquity."

"Spare me the ancients, Miss Gale," said Vizard, "and reveal me the girl of the period. When I was so ill-bred as to interrupt you, you had left France, crowned with laurels, and were just invading Britain."

Something in his words or his tone discouraged the subtle observer, and she said coldly, "Excuse me; I have hardly the courage. My British history is a tale of injustice, suffering, insult, and, worst of all, defeat. I cannot promise to relate it with that composure whoever pretends to science ought: the wound still bleeds."

Then Vizard was vexed with himself, and looked grave and concerned. He said gently, "Miss Gale, I am sorry to give you pain; but what you have told me is so new and interesting, I shall be disappointed if you withhold the rest. Besides,

you know it gives no lasting pain to relate our griefs. Come —come—be brave, and tell me."

"Well, I will," said she. "Indeed some instinct moves me. Good may come of my telling it you. I think—somehow—you are—a—just—man."

In the act of saying this, she fixed her grey eyes steadily and searchingly upon Vizard's face, so that he could scarcely meet them, they were so powerful; then suddenly, the observation seemed to die out of them, and reflection to take its place; those darting eyes were turned inwards. It was a marked variety of power. There was something wizard-like in the vividness with which two distinct mental processes were presented by the varied action of a single organ: and Vizard then began to suspect that a creature stood before him with a power of discerning and digesting truth, such as he had not yet encountered either in man or woman. She entered on her British adventures in her clear, silvery voice; it was not, like Ina Klosking's, rich and deep and tender, yet it had a certain gentle beauty to those who love truth, because it was dispassionate yet expressive, and cool yet not cold: one might call it truth's silver trumpet.

On the brink of this extraordinary passage I pause to make three remarks in my own person. 1st, Let no reader of mine allow himself to fancy Rhoda Gale and her antecedents are a mere excrescence of my story: she was rooted to it even before the first scene of it—the meeting of Ashmead and the Klosking—and this will soon appear. 2nd, She is now going into a controverted matter; and though she is sincere and truthful, she is of necessity a *partisan.* Do not take her for a judge. You be the judge. 3rd, But, as a judge never shuts his mind to either side, do not refuse her a fair hearing. Above all, do not underrate the question. Let not the balance of your understanding be so upset by ephemeral childishness, as to fancy that it matters much whether you break an egg top or bottom, because Gulliver's two nations went to war about it; or that it matters much whether your Queen is called Queen of India or Empress, because two parties made a noise about it, and the country has wasted ten thousand square miles of good paper on the subject. Fight against these illusions of petty and ephemeral minds. It does not matter one straw to *mankind* whether any one woman is called Queen or Empress of India; and it matters greatly to *mankind* whether

the whole race of women are to be allowed to study medicine, and practise it, if they can rival the male, or are to be debarred from testing their scientific ability, and so outlawed, *though taxed*, in defiance of British liberty, and all justice human and divine, by eleven hundred lawgivers—most of them fools.

CHAPTER XV

"When I reached Great Britain, the right of women to Medicine was in this condition—a learned lawyer explained it carefully to me; I will give you his words.—The unwritten law of every nation admits all mankind, and not the male half only, to the study and practice of medicine and the sale of drugs. In Great Britain this law is called the common law, and is deeply respected. Whatever liberty it allows to men or women is held sacred in our courts, until *directly* and *explicitly* withdrawn by some Act of the Legislature. Under this ancient liberty women have occasionally practised general medicine and surgery, up to the year 1858. But for centuries they *monopolised*, by custom, one branch of practice, the obstetric, and that, together with the occasional treatment of children, and the nursing of both sexes, which is semi-medical, and is their *monopoly*, seems, on the whole, to have contented them, till late years, when their views were enlarged by wider education and other causes. But their abstinence from general practice, like their monopoly of obstetrics, lay with women themselves, and not with the law of England. That law is the same in this respect as the common law of Italy and France; and the constitution of Bologna, where so many doctresses have filled the chairs of medicine and other sciences, makes no more direct provision for female students than does the constitution of any Scotch or English university. The whole thing lay with the women themselves, and with local civilisation. Years ago, Italy was far more civilised than England; so Italian women took a large sphere. Of late the Anglo-Saxon has gone in for civilisation with his usual energy, and is eclipsing Italy; therefore his women aspire to larger spheres of intellect and action, beginning in the States, because American women are better educated than English. The advance of *women* in useful attainments is the most infallible sign in any

country of advancing civilisation. All this about civilisation is my observation, sir, and not the lawyer's. Now for the lawyer again.—Such being the law of England, the British Legislature passed an Act in 1858, the real object of which was to protect the public against incapable doctors, not against capable doctresses or doctors. The Act excludes from medical practice all persons whatever, male or female, unless registered in a certain register; and to get upon that register, the person, male or female, must produce a license or diploma, granted by one of the British examining boards specified in a schedule attached to the Act.

"Now these examining boards were all members of the leading medical schools. If the Legislature had taken the usual precaution, and had added a clause *compelling* those boards to examine worthy applicants, the Act would have been a sound public measure; but for want of that foresight —and without foresight a lawgiver is an impostor and a public pest—the State robbed women of their old common-law rights with one hand, and with the other enabled a respectable trades-union to thrust them out of their new statutory rights. Unfortunately, the respectable union, to whom the Legislature delegated an unconstitutional power they did not claim themselves, of excluding qualified persons from examination, and so robbing them of their license and their bread, had an overpowering interest to exclude qualified women from medicine; they had the same interest as the watchmaker's union, the printers', the painters on china, the calico engravers', and others, have to exclude qualified women from those branches, though peculiarly fitted for them, but not more so than they are for the practice of medicine, Nature having made *them*, and not *men*, the medical and unmusical sex.

"Wherever there's a trades-union, the weakest go to the wall. Those vulgar unions I have mentioned exclude women from skilled labour they excel in, by violence and conspiracy, though the law threatens them with imprisonment for it. Was it in nature, then, that the medical union would be infinitely forbearing, when the Legislature went and patted it on the back, and said, *you* can conspire with safety against your female rivals? Of course the clique were tempted more than any clique could bear, by the unwariness of the Legislature, and closed the doors of the medical schools to female applicants. Against unqualified female practitioners they never acted with such zeal and consent; and why?—

the female quack is a public pest, and a good foil to the union; the qualified doctress is a public good, and a blow to the union.

"The British medical union was now in a fine attitude by Act of Parliament. It could talk its contempt of medical women, and act its terror of them, and keep both its feigned contempt and its real alarm safe from the test of a public examination, that crucible in which cant, surmise, and mendacity are soon evaporated or precipitated, and only the truth stands firm.

"For all that, two female practitioners got upon the register, and stand out, living landmarks of experience and the truth, in the dead wilderness of surmise and prejudice.

"I will tell you how they got in. The Act of Parliament makes two exceptions: first, it lets in, *without examination*—and that is very unwise—any foreign doctor who shall be practising in England at the date of the Act, although, with equal incapacity, it omits to provide that any future foreign doctor shall be able to *demand examination* (in with the old foreign fogies, blindfold, right or wrong; out with the rising foreign luminaries of an ever-advancing science, right or wrong); and secondly, it lets in, without examination, to experiment on the vile body of the public, any person, qualified or unqualified, who may have been made a doctor by a very venerable and equally irrelevant functionary. Guess, now, who it is that a British Parliament sets above the law, as a doctor-maker for that public it professes to love and protect?"

"The Regius Professor of Medicine?"

"No."

"Tyndall?"

"No."

"Huxley?"

"No."

"Then I give it up."

"The Archbishop of Canterbury."

"Oh, come! a joke is a joke."

"This is no joke. Bright monument of British flunkeyism and imbecility, there stands the clause setting that reverend and irrelevant doctor-maker above the law, which sets his Grace's female relations below the law, and, in practice, outlaws the whole female population, starving those who desire to practise medicine learnedly, and oppressing those who, out of modesty, not yet quite smothered by custom and

monopoly, desire to consult a learned female physician, instead of being driven, like sheep, by iron tyranny—in a country that babbles Liberty—to a male physician or a female quack.

"Well, sir, in 1849 Miss Elizabeth Blackwell fought the good fight in the United States, and had her troubles; because the States were not so civilised then as now. She graduated Doctor at Geneva in the State of New York.

"She was practising in England in 1858, and demanded her place on the register. She is an Englishwoman by birth; but she is an English M.D. only through America having more brains than Britain. This one islander sings, 'Hail Columbia!' as often as 'God save the Queen!' I reckon.

"Miss Garrett, an enthusiastic student, travelled north, south, east, and west, and knocked in vain at the doors of every great school and university in Britain; but at last found a chink in the iron shutters of the London Apothecaries. It seems Parliament was wiser in 1815 than in 1858, for it inserted a clause in the Apothecaries' Act of 1815 *compelling* them to examine all persons who should apply to them for examination, after proper courses of study. Their charter contained no loophole to evade the Act, and substitute 'him' for 'person'; so they let Miss Garrett in as a student. Like all the students, she had to attend lectures on chemistry, botany, materia medica, zoology, natural philosophy, and clinical surgery. In the collateral subjects they let her sit with the male students; but in anatomy and surgery she had to attend the same lectures privately, and pay for lectures all to herself. This cost her enormous fees. However, it is only fair to say that, if she had been one of a dozen female students the fees would have been diffused; as it was, she had to gild the pill out of her private purse.

"In the hospital teaching she met difficulties and discouragement, though she asked for no more opportunities than are granted readily to professional nurses and female amateurs. But the whole thing is a mere money question; that is the key to every lock in it.

"She was freely admitted at last to one great hospital, and all went smoothly till some surgeon examined the students *vivâ voce;* then Miss Garrett was off her guard, and displayed too marked a superiority; thereupon the male students played the woman, and begged she might be excluded; and I am sorry to say, for the credit of your sex, this un-

manly request was complied with by the womanish males in power.

"However, at her next hospital, Miss Garrett was more discreet, and took pains to conceal her galling superiority.

"All her trouble ended—where her competitors began—at the public examination. She passed brilliantly, and is an English apothecary. In civilised France she is a learned physician.

"She had not been an apothecary a week before the Apothecaries' Society received six hundred letters from the medical small-fry in town and country; they threatened to send no more boys to the Apothecaries', but to the College of Surgeons, if ever another woman received an apothecary's licence. Now you know all men tremble in England at the threats of a trades-union; so the Apothecaries instantly cudgelled their brains to find a way to disobey the law, and obey the union. The medical press gave them a hint, and they passed a by-law, forbidding their students to receive any part of their education *privately;* and made it known, at the same time, that their female students would not be allowed to study the leading subjects *publicly.* And so they baffled the Legislature, and outlawed half the nation, by a juggle, which the press and the public would have risen against, if a single grown-up man had been its victim, instead of four million adult women. Now you are a straightforward man; what do you think of that?"

"Humph!" said Vizard; "I do not altogether approve it. The strong should not use the arts of the weak in fighting the weak. But in spite of your eloquence I mean to forgive them anything. Shakspeare has provided them with an excuse that fits all time,—

'Our poverty, but not our will consents.'"

"Poverty! the poverty of a company in the city of London! *Allons donc.* Well, sir, for years after this all Europe, even Russia, advanced in civilisation, and opened their medical schools to women; so did the United States; only the pig-headed Briton stood stock-still, and gloried in his minority of one; as if one small island is likely to be right in its monomania, and all civilised nations wrong.

"But, whilst I was studying in France, one lion-hearted Englishwoman was moving our native isle. First she tried the University of London; and that sets up for a liberal

foundation. Answer—'Our charter is expressly framed to exclude women from medical instruction.'

"Then she sat down to besiege Edinburgh. Now Edinburgh is a very remarkable place. It has only half the houses, but ten times the intellect, of Liverpool or Manchester. And the University has two advantages as a home of *science* over the English universities: it is far behind them in Greek, which is the language of Error and Nescience, and before them in English, and that is a tongue a good deal of knowledge is printed in. Edinburgh is the only centre of British literature, except London.

"One medical professor received the pioneer with a concise severity, and declined to hear her plead her cause; and one received her almost brutally. He said, 'No respectable woman would apply to him to study medicine.' Now respectable women were studying it all over Europe."

"Well, but perhaps his soul lived in an island."

"That is so. However, personal applicants must expect a rub or two; and most of the professors, in and out of medicine, treated her with kindness and courtesy.

"Still, she found even the friendly professors alarmed at the idea of a woman matriculating, and becoming Civis Edinensis; so she made a moderate application to the Senate —viz., for leave to attend medical lectures. This request was endorsed by a majority of the medical professors, and granted. But on the appeal of a few medical professors against it, the Senate suspended its resolution, on the ground that there was only one applicant.

"This got wind, and other ladies came into the field directly, your humble servant amongst them. Then the Senate felt bound to recommend the University Court to admit such female students to matriculate as could pass the preliminary examination—this is in history, logic, languages, and other branches; and we prepared for it in good faith. It was a happy time. After a good day's work I used to go up the Calton Hill, or Arthur's Seat, and view the sea, and the Piræus, and the violet hills, and the romantic undulations of the city itself, and my heart glowed with love of knowledge, and with honourable ambition. I ran over the names of worthy women who had adorned medicine at sundry times and in divers places, and resolved to deserve as great a name as any in history. Refreshed by my walk—I generally walked eight miles, and practised gymnastics to keep my muscles hard—I used to return to my little lodg-

ings; and they too were sweet to me, for I was learning a new science—logic."

"That was a nut to crack."

"I have met few easier or sweeter. One non-observer had told me it was a sham science, and mere pedantry; another, that it pretended to show men a way to truth without observing. I found on the contrary, that it was a very pretty little science, which does not affect to discover phenomena, but simply to guard men against rash generalisation, and false deductions from true data. It taught me the untrained world is brimful of fallacies and verbal *équivoques*, that ought not to puzzle a child, but whenever they creep into an argument, do actually confound the learned and the simple alike, and all for want of a month's logic.

"Yes, I was happy on the hill, and happy by the hearth; and so things went on till the preliminary examination came. It was not severe; we ladies all passed with credit, though many of the male aspirants failed."

"How do you account for that?" asked Vizard.

"With my eyes. I *observe* that the average male is very superior in intellect to the average female; and I *observe* that the picked female is immeasurably more superior to the average male, than the average male is to the average female."

"Is it so simple as that?"

"Ay, why not? What! are you one of those who believe that Truth is obscure; hides herself; and lies in a well? I tell you, *sir*, Truth lies in no well. The place Truth lies in is—*the middle of the turnpike-road.* But one old fogey puts on his green spectacles to look for her, and another his red, and another his blue; and so they all miss her, because she is a colourless diamond. Those spectacles are preconceived notions, *a priori* reasoning, cant, prejudice, the depth of Mr. Shallow's inner consciousness, &c., &c. Then comes the *observer*, opens the eyes that God has given him, tramples on all coloured spectacles, and finds Truth as surely as the spectacled theorists miss her. Say that the intellect of the average male is to the average female as ten to six, it is to the intellect of the picked female as ten to a hundred and fifty, or even less. Now the intellect of the male Edinburgh student was much above that of the average male, but still it fell far below that of the picked female. All the examinations at Edinburgh showed this to all God's unspectacled creatures that used their eyes."

These remarks hit Vizard hard. They accorded with his own good sense and method of arguing; but perhaps my more careful readers may have already observed this. He nodded hearty approval for once; and she went on:—

"We had now a right to matriculate, and enter on our medical course. But, to our dismay, the right was suspended. The proofs of our general proficiency, which we hoped would reconcile the professors to us as students of medicine, alarmed people, and raised us unscrupulous enemies in some who were justly respected, and others who had influence, though they hardly deserved it.

"A general council of the University was called to reconsider the pledge the Senate had given us, and overawe the University Court by the weight of academic opinion. The Court itself was fluctuating, and ready to turn either way. A large number of male students co-operated against us, with a petition. They, too, were a little vexed at our respectable figure in the preliminary examination.

"The assembly met, and the union orator got up; he was a preacher of the Gospel, and carried the weight of that office. Christianity, as well as science, seemed to rise against us in his person. He made a long and eloquent speech, based on the intelligent surmises and popular prejudices that were diffused in a hundred leading articles, and in letters to the editor by men and women, to whom history was a dead letter in modern controversies; for the press battled this matter for two years, and furnished each party with an artillery of reasons, *pro* and *con*.

"He said: 'Woman's sphere is the hearth and the home: to impair her delicacy is to take the bloom from the peach: she could not qualify for medicine without mastering anatomy and surgery, branches that must unsex her. Providence, intending her to be man's helpmate, not his rival, had given her a body unfit for war or hard labour, and a brain four ounces lighter than a man's, and unable to cope with long study and practical science. In short, she was too good, and too stupid, for medicine.'

"It was eloquent, but it was *à priori* reasoning, and conjecture *versus* evidence: yet the applause it met with showed one how happy is the orator *qui hurle avec les loups*. Taking the scientific preacher's whole theory in theology and science, woman was high enough in creation to be the mother of God, but not high enough to be a sawbones.

"Well, a professor of *belles lettres* rose on our side, not

with a rival theory, but with facts. He was a pupil of Lord Bacon, and a man of the nineteenth century; so he objected to *à priori* reasoning on a matter of experience. To settle the question of capacity, he gave a long list of women who had been famous in science. Such as Bettesia Gozzadina, Novella Andrea, Novella Calderini, Maddelena Buonsignori, and many more, who were doctors of law and university professors; Dorotea Bocchi, who was professor both of philosophy and medicine; Laura Bassi, who was elected professor of philosophy in 1732 by acclamation, and afterwards professor of experimental physics; Anna Manzolini, professor of anatomy in 1760; Gaetana Agnesi, professor of mathematics; Christina Roccati, doctor of philosophy in 1750; Clotilde Tambroni, professor of Greek in 1793; Maria Dalle Donne, doctor of medicine in 1799; Zaffira Ferretti, doctor of medicine in 1800; Maria Sega, doctor of medicine in 1799; Madalena Noe, graduate of civil law in 1807. Ladies innumerable, who graduated in law and medicine at Pavia, Ferrara, and Padua, including Elena Lucrezia Cornaro of Padua, a very famous woman. Also in Salamanca, Alcala, Cordova, he named more than one famous doctress. Also in Heidelberg, Göttingen, Giessen, Würzburg, &c., and even at Utrecht, with numberless graduates in the arts and faculties at Montpellier and Paris in all ages. Also outside reputations as of Doctor Bouvin and her mother, acknowledged celebrities in their branch of medicine. This chain, he said, has never been really broken. There was scarcely a great foreign university without some female student of high reputation. There were such women at Vienna and Petersburg: many such at Zurich. At Montpellier Mademoiselle Doumergue was carrying all before her, and Miss Garrett and Miss Mary Putman at Paris, though they were weighted in the race by a foreign language. Let the male English physician pass a stiff examination in scientific French before he brayed so loud. He had never done it yet. This, he said, is not an age of chimeras, it is a wise and wary age, which has established in all branches of learning a sure test of ability in man or woman—public examination followed by a public report. These public examinations are all conducted by males, and women are passing them triumphantly all over Europe and America, and graduate as doctors in every civilised country, and even in half-civilised Russia.

"He then went into our own little preliminary examina-

tion, and gave the statistics. In Latin were examined 55 men and 3 women: 10 men were rejected, but no woman; 7 men were respectable, 7 *optimi* or first-rate, 1 woman *bona*, and 1 *optima*. In mathematics were examined 67 men and 4 women, of whom 1 woman was *optima*, and 1 *bona*: 10 men were *optimi*, and 25 *boni*; the rest failed. In German 2 men were examined and 1 woman; 1 man was good, and 1 woman. In logic 28 men were examined and 1 woman: the woman came out fifth in rank, and she had only been at it a month. In moral philosophy 16 men were examined and 1 woman: the woman came out third. In arithmetic, 51 men and 3 women: 2 men were *optimi*, and 1 woman *optima*; several men failed, and not one woman. In mechanics, 81 men and 1 woman: the woman passed with fair credit, as did 13 men; the rest failing. In French were examined 58 men and 4 women: 3 men and 1 woman were respectable; 8 men and 1 woman passed; 2 women attained the highest excellence, *optimæ*, and not one man. In English, 63 men and 3 women: 3 men were good, and 1 woman; but 2 women were *optimæ*, and only 1 man."

"Fancy you remembering figures like that," said Vizard.

"It's all training and habit," said she simply.

"As to the study and practice of medicine degrading women, he asked if it degraded men. No; it elevated them. They could not contradict him on that point. He declined to believe, without a particle of evidence, that any science could elevate the higher sex and degrade the lower. What evidence we had ran against it. Nurses are not, as a class, unfeminine, yet all that is most appalling, disgusting, horrible, and *unsexing* in the art of healing is monopolised by them. Women see worse things than doctors. Women nurse all the patients of both sexes, often under horrible and sickening conditions, and lay out all the corpses. No doctor objects to this on sentimental grounds; and why? because the nurses get only a guinea a-week, and not a guinea a flying visit: to women the loathsome part of medicine; to man the lucrative! The noble nurses of the Crimea went to attend *males only*; yet were not charged with indelicacy. They worked gratis. The would-be doctresses look *mainly to attending women*; but then they want to be paid for it: there was the rub—it was a mere money question, and all the attempts of the union to hide this and play the sentimental shopman were transparent hypocrisy and humbug.

"A doctor justly revered in Edinburgh answered him, but said nothing new or effective; and, to our great joy, the majority went with us.

"Thus encouraged, the University Court settled the matter. We were admitted to matriculate and study medicine, under certain conditions, to which I beg your attention.

"The instruction of women for the profession of medicine was to be conducted in separate classes confined entirely to women.

"The professors of the faculty of medicine should, for this purpose, be permitted to have separate classes for women.

"All these regulations were approved by the Chancellor, and are to this day a part of the law of that University.

"We ladies, five in number, but afterwards seven, were matriculated and registered professional students of medicine, and passed six delightful months we now look back upon as if it was a happy dream.

"We were picked women, all in earnest; we deserved respect, and we met with it. The teachers were kind, and we attentive and respectful: the students were courteous, and we were affable to them, but discreet. Whatever seven young women could do to earn esteem, and reconcile even our opponents to the experiment, we did. There was not an anti-student, or downright flirt amongst us: and, indeed, I have observed that an earnest love of study and science controls the amorous frivolity of women even more than men's. Perhaps our heads are really *smaller* than men's, and we haven't room in them to be like Solomon—extremely wise and arrant fools.

"This went on till the first professional examination; but, after the examination, the war, to our consternation, recommenced. Am I then bad-hearted for thinking there must have been something in that examination which roused the sleeping spirit of trades-unionism?"

"It seems probable."

"Then view that probability by the light of fact:

"In physiology the male students were 127; in chemistry, 226.

"25 obtained honours in physiology.

"31 in chemistry.

"In physiology and chemistry there were five women. One obtained honours in physiology alone. Four obtained honours in both physiology and chemistry.

"So, you see, the female students beat the male students in physiology at the rate of five to one, and in chemistry seven and three-quarters to one.

"But, horrible to relate, one of the ladies eclipsed twenty-nine out of the thirty-one gentlemen who took *honours* in chemistry. In capacity she surpassed them all; for the two who were above her obtained only two marks more than she did, yet they had been a year longer at the study. This entitled her to 'a Hope Scholarship' for that year.

"Would you believe it? the scholarship was refused her —in utter defiance of the founder's conditions—on the idle pretext that she had studied at a different hour from the male students, and therefore was not a member of the chemistry class."

"Then why admit her to the competition?" said Vizard.

"Why? because the *à priori* reasoners took for granted she would be defeated. Then the cry would have been 'you had your chance; we let you try for the Hope Scholarship; but you could not win it.' Having won it, she was to be cheated out of it somehow, or anyhow. The separate class system was not that lady's fault; she would have preferred to pay the University lecturer lighter fees, and attend a better lecture with the male students. The separate class was an unfavourable condition of study, which the University imposed on us, as the condition of admitting us to the professional study of medicine. Surely, then, to cheat that lady out of her Hope Scholarship, when she had earned it under conditions of study enforced and unfavourable, was perfidious and dishonest. It was even a little ungrateful to the injured sex; for the money which founded these scholarships was women's money, every penny of it. The good Professor Hope had lectured to ladies fifty years ago; had taken their fees, and founded his scholarships with their money: and it would have done his heart good to see a lady win, and wear that prize, which, but for his female pupils, would never have existed. But it is easy to trample on a dead man; as easy as on living women.

"The perfidy was followed by ruthless tyranny. They refused to admit the fair criminal to the laboratory, 'else,' said they, 'she'll defeat more men.'

"That killed her as a chemist. It gave inferior male students too great an advantage over her. And so the public and Professor Hope were sacrificed to a trades-union,

and lost a great analytical chemist, and something more—she had, to my knowledge, a subtle diagnosis. Now we have, at present, no *great* analyst, and the few competent analysts we have do not possess diagnosis in proportion. They can find a few poisons in the dead, but they are slow to discover them in the living; so they are not to be counted on to save a life, where Crime is administering poison. That woman could, and would, I think.

"They drove her out of chemistry, wherein she was a genius, into surgery, in which she was only a talent. She is now house-surgeon in a great hospital, and the public has lost a great chemist and diagnostic physician combined.

"Up to the date of this enormity the press had been pretty evenly divided for and against us. But now, to their credit, they were unanimous, and reprobated the juggle as a breach of public faith and plain morality. Backed by public opinion, one friendly professor took this occasion to move the University to relax the regulation of separate classes, since it had been abused. He proposed that the female students should be admitted to the ordinary classes.

"This proposal was negatived by 58 to 47.

"This small majority was gained by a characteristic manœuvre. The Queen's name was gravely dragged in as disapproving the proposal, when in fact it could never have been submitted to her, or her comment, if any, must have been in writing; and as to the general question, she has never said a public word against medical women. She has too much sense not to ask herself, How can any woman be fit to be a queen, with powers of life and death, if no woman is fit to be so small a thing, by comparison, as a physician, or a surgeon?

"We were victims of a small majority, obtained by imagination playing upon flunkeyism; and the first result was, we were not allowed to sit down to botany with males. Mind you, we might have gathered blackberries with them in umbrageous woods, from morn till dewy eve, and not a professor shocked in the whole Faculty; but we must not sit down with them to an intellectual dinner of herbs, and listen, in their company, to the pedantic terms and childish classifications of botany, in which kindred properties are ignored. Only the male student must be told publicly that a foxglove is *Digitalis purpurea* in the improved nomenclature of science, and crow-foot is *Ranunculus sceleratus*, and the buck-bean is *Menyanthis trifoliata*, and mugwort is *Artemesia*

judaica; and that having lost the properties of hyssop known to Solomon, we regain our superiority over that learned Hebrew by christening it *Gratiola officinalis.* The sexes must not be taught in one room to discard such ugly and inexpressive terms as snowdrop, meadow-sweet, heart's-ease, feverfew, cowslip, &c., and learn to know the cowslip as *Veris*—by class, *pentandria monogynia;* and the buttercup as *Acris, polyandria monogynia;* the snowdrop as *Galanthus nivalis, hexandria monogynia;* and the meadow-sweet as *Ulmaria;* the heart's-ease as *Viola tricolor;* and the daisy as *Bellis perennis —syngenesia superflua.*"

"Well," said Vizard, "I think the individual names can only hurt the jaws and other organs of speech. But the classifications! Is the mild lustre of science to be cast over the natural disposition of young women towards *Polyandria monogynia?* Is trigamy to be identified in their sweet souls with floral innocence, and their victims sitting by?"

"Such classifications are puerile and fanciful," said Miss Gale; "but, for that very reason, they don't infect *animals* with trigamy. Novels are much more likely to do that."

"Especially ladies' novels," suggested Vizard meekly.

"But the sexes will never lose either morals or delicacy through courses of botany endured together. It will not hurt young ladies a bit to tell them in the presence of young gentlemen that a cabbage is a thalamifloral exogen, and its stamens are tetradynamous; nor that the mushroom, *Psalliata campestris,* and the toad-stool, *Myæna campestris,* are confounded by this science in one class, *Cryptogamia.* It will not even hurt them to be told that the properties of the *Arum maculatum* are little known, but that the males are crowded round the centre of the spadix, and the females seated at the base."

Vizard, pompously, "The pulpit and the tea-table are centres of similar phenomena. Now I think of it, the pulpit is a very fair calyx, but the tea-table is rather squat."

"Yes, sir. But, more than that, not one of these pedants who growled at promiscuous botany has once objected to promiscuous dancing, not even with the gentleman's arm round the ladies' waists, which the custom of centuries cannot render decent. Yet the professors of delicacy connive, and the mother geese sit smirking at the wall. Oh, world of hypocrites and humbugs!"

"I am afraid you are an upsetter-general," said Vizard.

"But you are abominably sincere; and all this is a curious chapter of human nature. Pray proceed."

Miss Gale nodded gravely, and resumed.

"So much public ridicule fell on the union for this, and the blind flunkeyism, which could believe the Queen had meddled in the detail, that the professors melted under it, and threw open botany and natural history to us, with other collateral sciences.

"Then came the great fight, which is not ended yet.

"To qualify for medicine, and pass the stiff examination, by which the public is very properly protected, you must be versed in anatomy and clinical surgery. Books and lectures do not suffice for this, without the human subject—alive and dead. The University Court knew that very well when it matriculated us, and therefore it provided for our instruction by promising us separate classes.

"Backed by this public pledge, we waited on the University Professor of Anatomy to arrange our fees for a separate lecture. He flatly refused to instruct us separately for love or money, or to permit his assistants. That meant, 'The union sees a way to put you in a cleft stick and cheat you out of your degree, in spite of the pledge the University has given you; in spite of your fees and of your time given to study in reliance on the promise.'

"This was a heavy blow. But there was an extra-mural establishment called Surgeons' Hall, and the University formally recognised all the lecturers in this Hall; so we applied to those lecturers, and they were shocked at the illiberality of the University professors, and admitted us at once to mixed classes. We attended lectures with the male students on anatomy and surgery, and *of all the anticipated evils, not one took place, sir.*

"The objections to mixed classes proved to be idle words; yet the old-fashioned minds opposed to us shut their eyes and went on reasoning *à priori,* and proving that the evils which they saw did not arise *must* arise should the experiment of mixed classes, which was then succeeding, ever be tried.

"To qualify us for examination we now needed but one thing more, hospital practice. The Infirmary is supported not so much by the University as the town. We applied, therefore, with some confidence for the permission usually conceded to medical students. The managers refused us the *town infirmary.* Then we applied to the subscribers. The

majority not belonging to a trades-union, declared in our favour, and intimated plainly that they would turn out the illiberal managers at the next election of managers.

"But by this time the war was hot and general, and hard blows were dealt on both sides. It was artfully suppressed by our enemies in the profession and in the press that we had begged hard for the separate class which had been promised us in anatomy, and permission to attend, by ourselves, a limited number of wards in the infirmary; and on this falsehood by suppression worse calumnies were built.

"I shall tell you what we really were, and what foul mouths and pens insinuated we must be.

"Two accomplished women had joined us, and we were now the seven wise virgins of a half-civilised nation, and, if I know black from white, we were seven of its brightest ornaments. We were seven ladies, who wished to be doctresses, especially devoted to our own sex; seven good students, who went on our knees to the University for those separate classes in anatomy and clinical surgery which the University was bound in honour to supply us; but, our prayer rejected, said to the University, 'Well, use your own discretion about separate or mixed classes: but for your own credit, and that of human nature, do not wilfully tie a hangman's noose to throttle the weak and deserving, and don't cheat seven poor, hard-working, meritorious women, your own matriculated students, out of our entrance-fees, which lie to this day in the University coffers, out of the exceptionally heavy fees we have paid to your professors, out of all the fruit of our hard study, out of our diplomas, and our bread. Solve the knot your own way. We will submit to mixed classes, or anything, except professional destruction.'

"In this spirit our lion-hearted leader wrote the letter of an uninjured dove, and said, there were a great many more wards in the infirmary than any male student could or did attend; we would be content to divide the matter thus: the male students to have the monopoly of two-thirds, we to have the bare right of admission to one-third. By this the male students (if any) who had a sincere objection to study the sick, and witness operations, in our company, could never be troubled with us; and we, though less favoured than the male students, could just manage to qualify for that public examination which was to prove whether we could make able physicians or not.

"Sir, this gentle proposal was rejected with rude scorn, and in aggressive terms. Such is the spirit of a trades-union.

"Having now shown you what we were, I will now tell you what our enemies, declining to observe our conduct, though it was very public, suggested we *must* be. Seven shameless women who pursued medicine as a handle for sexuality; who went into the dissecting-room to dissect males, and into the hospital to crowd round the male patient, and who *demanded* mixed classes, that we might have male companions in those studies, which every feminine woman would avoid altogether.

"This key-note struck, the public was regaled with a burst of hypocrisy such as Molière never had the luck to witness, or oh, what a comedy he would have written!

"The immodest sex, taking advantage of Molière's decease without heirs of his brain, set to work in public to teach the modest sex modesty.

"In the conduct of this pleasant paradox, the representatives of that sex, which has much courage and little modesty, were two professors — who conducted the paradox so judiciously that the London press reprimanded them for their foul insinuations—and a number of young men called medical students.

"Now the medical student surpasses most young men in looseness of life and indecency of mind and speech.

"The representatives of womanhood to be instructed in modesty by these animals, old and young, were seven prudes, whose minds were devoted to study and honourable ambition. These women were as much above the average of their sex in feminine reserve and independence of the male sex as they were in intellect.

"The average girl, who throughout this discussion was *all of a sudden* puffed as a lily, because she ceased to be *observed*, can attend to nothing if a man is by; she can't work, she can't play, she is so eaten up with the feelings of her sex. The frivolous soul can just manage to play croquet with females; but, enter a man upon the scene, and she does even that very ill, and can hardly be got to take her turn in the only thing she has really given her mind to. We were angels compared with this paltry creature, and she was the standing butt of public censure, until it was found that an imaginary picture of her could be made the handle for insulting her betters.

"Against these seven prudes, decent dotards and their foul-mouthed allies flung out insinuations, which did not escape public censure; and the medical students declared their modesty was shocked at our intrusion into anatomy and surgery, and petitioned against us. Some of the press were deceived by this for a time, and *hurlaient avec les loups.*

"I took up, one day, my favourite weekly, in which nearly every writer seems to me a scholar: and was regaled with such lines as this:—

"'It appears that girls are to associate with boys as medical students, in order that, when they become women, they may be able to speak to men with entire plainness upon all the subjects of a doctor's daily practice.

"'In plain words, the aspirants to medicine and surgery desire to rid themselves speedily and effectually of that modesty which nature has planted in women.' And then the writer concludes: 'We beg to suggest that there are other places besides dissecting-rooms and hospitals where those ladies may relieve themselves of the modesty which they find so troublesome. But fathers naturally object to this being done at their sons' expense.'"

"Infamous!" cried Vizard. "One comfort, no man ever penned that. That is some old woman, writing down young ones."

"I don't know," said Rhoda. "I have met so many womanish men in this business. All I know is, that my cheeks burned, and, for once in the fight, scalding tears ran down them. It was as if a friend had spat upon me.

"What a chimera! What a monstrous misinterpretation of pure minds by minds impure! To *us* the dissecting-room was a temple, and the dead an awe, revolting to all our senses, until the knife revealed to our minds the Creator's hand in structural beauties that the trained can appreciate, if wicked dunces can't.

"And as to the infirmary, we should have done just what we did at Zurich. We held a little aloof from the male patients, unless some good-natured lecturer, or pupil, gave us a signal, and then we came forward. If we came uninvited, we always stood behind the male students; but we did crowd round the beds of the female patients, and claimed the inner row: AND, SIR, THEY THANKED GOD FOR US OPENLY.

"A few awkward revelations were made during this discussion. A medical student had the candour to write and say that he had been at a lecture, and the professor had

told an indelicate story, and, finding it palatable to his modest males, had said: 'There, gentlemen; now if female students were admitted here, I could not have told you this amusing circumstance.' So that it was our purifying influence he dreaded in secret, though he told the public he dreaded the reverse.

"Again, female patients wrote to the journals, to beg that female students might be admitted to come between them and the brutal curiosity of the male students, to which they were subjected in so offensive a way, that more than one poor creature declared she had felt agonies of shame, even in the middle of an agonising operation.

"This being a cry from that public for whose sake the whole clique of physicians—male and female—exists, had, of course, no great weight in the union controversy.

"But, sir, if grave men and women will sit calmly down and fling dirt upon every woman who shall aspire to medicine in an island—though she can do so on a neighbouring continent with honour—and choose their time when the dirt can only fall on seven known women—since the female students in that island are only seven—the pretended generality becomes a cowardly personality, and wounds as such, and excites less cold-hearted, and more hot-headed, blackguards to outrage. It was so at Philadelphia, and it was so at Edinburgh.

"Our extra-mural teacher in anatomy was about to give a competitive examination. Now on these occasions we were particularly obnoxious. Often and clearly as it had been proved, by *à priori* reasoning, that we *must* be infinitely inferior to the average male, we persisted in proving, by hard fact, that we *were* infinitely his superior; and every examination gave us an opportunity of crushing solid reasons under hollow fact.

"A band of medical students determined that, for once, *à priori* reasoning should have fair play, and not be crushed by a thing so illusory as fact. Accordingly they got the gates closed, and collected round them. We came up, one after another, and were received with hisses, groans, and abusive epithets.

"This mode of reasoning must have been admirably adapted to my weak understanding: for it convinced me at once I had no business there; and I was for private study directly.

"But, sir, you know the ancients said, 'Better is an army of stags with a lion for their leader, than an army of lions

with a stag for their leader.' Now it so happened that we had a lioness for our leader. She pushed manfully through the crowd, and hammered at the door; then we crept quaking after. She ordered those inside to open the gates; and some student took shame, and did. In marched our lioness, crept after by her—her——"

"Her cubs."

"A thousand thanks, good sir. Her does. On second thoughts, 'her hinds.' Doe is the female of buck; now I said stags. Well, the ruffians who had undertaken to teach us modesty swarmed in too. They dragged a sheep into the lecture-room, lighted pipes, produced bottles, drank, smoked, and abused us ladies to our faces; and interrupted the lecturer at intervals with their howls and ribaldry; that was intended to show the professor he should not be listened to any more if he admitted the female students. The affair got wind, and other students, not connected with medicine, came pouring in, with no worse motive, probably, than to see the lark. Some of these, however, thought the introduction of the sheep unfair to so respected a lecturer, and proceeded to remove her; but the professor put up his hand and said: 'Oh, don't remove *her;* she is superior in intellect to many persons here present.'

"At the end of the lecture, thinking us in actual danger from these ruffians, he offered to let us out by a side door; but our lioness stood up and said, in a voice that rings in my ear even now, 'Thank you, sir; no. There are *gentlemen* enough here to escort us safely.'

"The magic of a great word from a great heart at certain moments when minds are heated! At that word, sir, the scales fell from a hundred eyes; manhood awoke with a start, ay, and chivalry too; fifty manly fellows were round us in a moment, with glowing cheeks and eyes, and they carried us all home to our several lodgings in triumph. The cowardly caitiffs of the trades-union howled outside, and managed to throw a little dirt upon our gowns, and also hurled epithets most of which were new to me; but it has since been stated by persons more versed in the language of the *canaille,* that no fouler terms are known to the dregs of mankind.

"Thus did the immodest sex, in the person of the medical student, outrage seven fair samples of the modest sex—to teach them modesty.

"Next morning the police magistrates dealt with a few of

our teachers—inflicted severe rebukes on them, and feeble fines.

"The craftier elders disowned the riot in public, but approved it in private; and continued to act in concert with it, only with cunning, not violence. *It caused no honest revulsion of feeling*, except in the disgusted public, and they had no power to help us.

"The next incident was a stormy debate, by the subscribers to the Infirmary; and here we had a little feminine revenge, which, outraged as we had been, I hope you will not grudge us.

"Our lioness subscribed £5, and became entitled to vote and speech. As the foulest epithets had been hurled at her by the union, and a certain professor had told her, to her face, no respectable woman would come to him and propose to study medicine, she said, publicly, that she had come to his opinion, and respectable women would avoid him—which caused a laugh.

"She also gave a venerable old physician, our bitter opponent, a slap that was not quite so fair. His attendant had been concerned in that outrage, and she assumed—in which she was not justified—that the old doctor approved. 'To be sure,' said she, 'they say he was intoxicated, and that is the only possible excuse.'

"The old doctor had only to say that he did not control his assistants in the street; and his own mode of conducting the opposition, and his long life of honour, were there to correct this young woman's unworthy surmises—and she would have had to apologise for going too far on mere surmise. But, instead of that, he was so injudicious as to accuse her of foul language, and say, 'My attendant is a perfect gentleman; he would not be my attendant if he were not.'

"Our lioness had him directly. 'Oh,' said she, 'if Doctor So-and-So prefers to say that his attendant committed that outrage on decency when in his sober senses, I am quite content.'

"This was described as violent invective by people with weak memories, who had forgotten the nature of the outrage our lioness was commenting on; but in truth it was only superior skill in debate, with truth to back it.

"For my part, I kept the police report at the time, and have compared it with her speech;—the judicial comments on those rioters are far more severe than hers. The truth is, it was her facts that hit too hard, not her expressions.

"Well, sir, she obtained a majority; and those managers of the Infirmary, who objected to female students, were dismissed, and others elected. At the same meeting the Court of Contributors passed a statute, making it the law of the Infirmary, that students should be admitted without regard to sex.

"But as to the mere election of managers, the other party demanded a scrutiny of the votes, and instructive figures came out. There voted with us twenty-eight firms, thirty-one ladies, seven doctors.

"There voted with the union fourteen firms, two ladies, *thirty-seven doctors*, and three *druggists*.

"Thereupon the trades-union, as declared by the figures, alleged that firms ought not to vote. *Nota bene*—they always had voted unchallenged, till they voted for fair play to women.

"The union served the Provost with an interdict not to declare the new managers elected.

"We applied for our tickets under the new statute, but were impudently refused, under the plea that the managers must first be consulted: so did the servants of the Infirmary defy the masters, in order to exclude us.

"By this time the great desire of women to practise medicine had begun to show itself. Numbers came in, and matriculated; and the pressure on the authorities to keep faith, and relax the dead-lock they had put us in, was great.

"Thereupon the authorities, instead of saying, 'We have pledged ourselves to a great number of persons, and guided their lives,' took fright, and cast about for juggles. They affected to discover all of a sudden that they had acted illegally in matriculating female students. They would therefore not give back their fees, and pay them two handred pounds apiece for breach of contract, but merely stop their studies until compelled by judicial decision to keep faith. Observe, it was under advice of the Lord Justice-General they had matriculated us, and entered into a contract with us, *for fulfilling which it was not, and is not, in the power of any mortal man to punish them.*

"But these pettifoggers said this, '*We* have acted illegally, and therefore not we, but *you*, shall suffer: *we* will *profit* by our illegal act, for we will retain your fees to the University, and your fees to its professors, and rob you of the seed-time of your youth, that we have wasted.'

"Now in that country they can get the opinions of the judges, by raising what they call an action of declarator.

"One would think it was their business to go to the judges, and meantime give us the benefit of legal doubt, while it lasted; and of the moral no-doubt, which will last till the day of judgment, and a day after.

"Not a bit of it. They broke their contract with us, refused us the article we had bought of them, and disowned equity, yet shifted the burden of law on to our shoulders. Litigation is long. Possession is nine points. The female students are now sitting with their hands before them, their studies suspended, waiting till time shall show them whether lawyers can pettifog as well as doctors.

"As for me, I had retired to civilised climes long before this. I used to write twice a week to my parents; but I withheld all mention of the outrage at Surgeons' Hall. I knew it would give them useless pain. But in three weeks or so came a letter from my father, unlike any other I ever knew him write. It did not even begin 'My dear child.' This was what he said, — the words are engraved in my memory: 'Out of that nation of cowards and skunks: out of it this moment, once and for ever. The States are your home. Draft on London enclosed. Write to me from France next week, or write to me no more. Graduate in France. Then come north, and sail from Havre to New York. You have done with Britain, and so have I, till our next war. Pray God that mayn't be long!'

"It was like a lion's roar of anguish. I saw my dear father's heart was bursting with agony and rage at the insult to his daughter, and I shed tears for him those wretches had never drawn from me.

"I had cried at being insulted by scholars, in the press; but what was it to me that the scum of the medical profession called me words I did not know the meaning of, and flung the dirt of their streets, and the filth of their souls, after me? I was frightened a little, that is all. But that these reptiles could wound my darling old lion's heart across the ocean—— Sir, he was a man who could be keen and even severe with men: but every virtuous woman was a sacred thing to him; had he seen one, though a stranger, insulted as we were, he would have died in her defence: he was a true American. And to think the dregs of mankind could wound him for his daughter, and so near the end of his own dear life. Oh!" She turned her head away.

"My poor girl!" said Vizard, and his own voice was broken.

When he said that, she gave him her hand, and seemed to cling to it a little; but she turned her head away from him, and cried, and even trembled a little.

But she very soon recovered herself, and said she would try to end her story. It had been long enough.

"Sir, my father had often obeyed me; but now I knew I must obey him. I got testimonials in Edinburgh, and started South directly; in a week I was in the South of France. Oh, what a change in people's minds by mere change of place! The professors received me with winning courtesy; some hats were lifted to me in the street, with marked respect; flowers were sent to my lodgings by gentlemen, who never once intruded on me in person. I was in a civilised land. Yet there was a disappointment for me. I inquired for Cornelia. The wretch had just gone and married a professor. I feared she was up to no good, by her writing so seldom of late.

"I sent her a line that an old friend had returned, and had not forgotten her, nor our mutual vows.

"She came directly, and was for caressing away her crime, and dissolving it in crocodile tears; but I played the injured friend and tyrant.

"Then she curled round me, and coaxed, and said: 'Sweetheart, I can advance your interests all the better. You shall be famous for us both. I shall be happier in your success than in my own.'

"In short she made it very hard to hold spite; and it ended in feeble-minded embraces. Indeed she *was* of service to me. I had a favour to ask; I wanted leave to count my Scotch time in France.

"My view was tenable; and Cornelia, by her beauty and her popularity, gained over all the professors to it but one. He stood out.

"Well, sir, an extraordinary occurence befriended me; no, not extraordinary—unusual.

"I lodged on a second floor. The first floor was very handsome. A young Englishman and his wife took it for a week. She was musical; a real genius. The only woman I ever heard sing without whining, for we are, by nature, the medical and unmusical sex."

"So you said before."

"I know I did; and I mean to keep saying it till people

see it. Well, the young man was taken violently and mysteriously ill; had syncope after syncope, and at last ceased to breathe.

"The wife was paralysed, and sat stupefied, and the people about feared for her reason.

"After a time they begged me to come down and talk to her. Of course I went. I found her with her head upon his knees. I sat down quietly, and looked at him. He was young and beautiful, but with a feminine beauty. His head finely shaped, with curly locks that glittered in the sun, and one golden lock lighter than the rest. His eyes and eye-lashes, his oval face, his white neck, and his white hand, all beautiful. His left hand rested on the counterpane. There was an emerald ring on one finger. He was like some beautiful flower cut down. I can see him now.

"The woman lifted her head and saw me. She had a noble face, though now distorted and wild.

"She cried, 'Tell me he is not dead! tell me he is not dead!' and when I did not reply, the poor creature gave a wild cry, and her senses left her. We carried her into another room.

"Whilst the women were bringing her to, an official came to insist on the interment taking place. They are terribly expeditious in the South of France.

"This caused an altercation; and the poor lady rushed out, and finding the officer peremptory, flung her arms round the body, and said they should not be parted—she would be buried with him.

"The official was moved, but said the law was strict, and the town must conduct the funeral unless she could find the sad courage to give the necessary instructions. With this he was going out, inexorable, when all of a sudden I observed something that sent my heart into my mouth, and I cried 'Arrêtez!' so loud that everybody stared.

"I said, 'You must wait till a physician has seen him; he has moved a finger.'

"I stared at the body, and they all stared at me.

"He *had* moved a finger. When I first saw him his fingers were all close together; but now the little finger was quite away from the third finger, the one with the ring on.

"I felt his heart and found a little warmth about it, but no perceptible pulse. I ordered them to take off his sheet and

put on blankets, but not to touch him till I came back with a learned physician. The wife embraced me, all trembling, and promised obedience. I got a *fiacre* and drove to Dr. Brasseur, who was my hostile professor, but very able. I burst on him and told him I had a case of catalepsy for him; it wasn't catalepsy, you know, but physicians are fond of Greek; they prefer the wrong Greek word to the right English. So I called it 'catalepsy,' and said I believed they were going to bury a live man. He shrugged his shoulders, and said that was one of the customs of the country. He would come in an hour. I told him that would not do, the man would be in his coffin; he must come directly. He smiled at my impetuosity, and yielded.

"I got him to the patient. He examined him, and said he might be alive, but feared the last spark was going out. He dared not venture on friction. We must be wary.

"Well, we tried this stimulant and that, till at last we got a sigh out of the patient; and I shall not forget the scream of joy, at that sigh, which made the room ring, and thrilled us all.

"By-and-by I was so fortunate as to suggest letting a small stream of water fall from a height on his head and face. We managed that, and by-and-by were rewarded with a sneeze.

"I think a sneeze must revivify the brain wonderfully, for he made rapid progress, and then we tried friction, and he got well very quick. Indeed, as he had nothing the matter with him—except being dead—he got ridiculously well, and began paying us fulsome compliments, the doctor and me.

"So then we handed him to his joyful wife.

"They talk of crying for joy, as if it was done every day. I never saw it but once, and she was the woman. She made a curious gurgle; but it was very pretty. I was glad to have seen it, and very proud to be the cause.

"The next day that pair left. He was English; and so many good-natured strangers called on him that he fled swiftly, and did not even bid me good-bye. However, I was told they both inquired for me, and were sorry I was out when they went."

"How good of them!" said Vizard, turning red.

"Oh, never mind, sir; I made use of *him*. I scribbled an article that very day, entitled it, 'While there's life there's hope,' and rushed with it to the editor of a journal. He took it with delight. I wrote it *à la française:* picture of the

dead husband, mourning wife, the impending interment; effaced myself entirely, and said the wife had refused to bury him, until Dr. Brasseur, whose fame had reached her ears, had seen the body. To humour her, the doctor was applied to, and, his benevolence being equal to his science, he came: when lo! a sudden surprise: the swift, unerring eye of science detected some subtle sign that had escaped the lesser luminaries. He doubted the death. He applied remedies; he exhausted the means of his art, with little avail at first, but at last a sigh was elicited, then a sneeze; and, marvellous to relate, in one hour the dead man was sitting up, not convalescent, but well. I concluded with some reflections on this *most important case of suspended animation* very creditable to the profession of medicine, and Dr. Brasseur."

"There was a fox!"

"Well, look at my hair. What else could you expect? I said that before, too.

"My notice was published, and I sent it to the doctor, with my respects, but did not call on him. However, one day he met me, and greeted me with a low bow. 'Mademoiselle,' said he, 'you were always a good student; but now you show the spirit of a *confrère*, and so gracefully, that we are *all* agreed we must have you for one as soon as possible.'

"I curtseyed, and felt my face red, and said I should be the proudest woman in France.

"'Grand Dieu!' said he, 'I hope not; for your modesty is not the least of your charms.'

"So the way was made smooth, and I had to work hard, and in about fourteen months I was admitted to my final examination. It was a severe one; but I had some advantages. Each nation has its wisdom; and I had studied in various schools.

"Being a linguist, with a trained memory, I occasionally backed my replies with a string of French, German, English, and Italian authorities, that looked imposing.

"In short, I did pass with public applause, and cordial felicitation; they quite *fêted* me. The old welcomed me; the young escorted me home, and flung flowers over me at my door. I reappeared in the balcony, and said a few words of gratitude to them and their noble nation. They cheered, and dispersed.

"My heart was in a glow. I turned my eyes towards New

York: a fortnight more, and my parent should greet me as an European doctress, if not a British.

"The excitement had been too great; I sat a little exhausted on the sofa. They brought me a letter. It was black-edged. I tore it open, with a scream. My father was dead."

CHAPTER XVI

"I WAS prostrated, stupefied. I don't know what I did or how long I sat there. But Cornelia came to congratulate me, and found me there like stone, with the letter in my hand. She packed up my clothes, and took me home with her. I made no resistance. I seemed all broken and limp, soul and body, and not a tear that day.

"Oh, sir, how small everything seems beside bereavement. My troubles, my insults, were nothing now; my triumph nothing; for I had no father left to be proud of it with me.

"I wept with anguish a hundred times a day. Why had I left New York? why had I not foreseen this everyday calamity, and passed every precious hour by his side I was to lose?

"Terror seized me. My mother would go next. No life of any value was safe a day. Death did not wait for disease. It killed because it chose, and to show its contempt of hearts.

"But just as I was preparing to go to Havre, they brought me a telegram. I screamed at it, and put up my hands. I said, 'No, no;' I would not read it, to be told my mother was dead. I would have her a few minutes longer. Cornelia read it, and said it was from her. I fell on it and kissed it. The blessed telegram told she was coming home. I was to go to London and wait for her.

"I started. Cornelia paid my fees, and put my diploma in my box. *I* cared for nothing now but my own flesh and blood, what was left of it, my mother.

"I reached London, and telegraphed my address to my mother, and begged her to come at once and ease my fears. I told her my funds were exhausted, but of course that was not the thing I poured out my heart about; so I daresay she hardly realised my deplorable condition—listless and bereaved, alone in a great city, with no money.

"In her next letter she begged me to be patient. She had trouble with her husband's executors; she would send me a draft as soon as she could; but she would not leave and let her child be robbed.

"By-and-by the landlady pressed me for money. I gave her my gowns and shawls to sell for me."

"Goose!"

"And just now I was a fox."

"You are both. But so is every woman."

"She handed me a few shillings, by way of balance. I lived on them till they went. Then I starved a little."

"With a ring on your finger you could have pawned for ten guineas!"

"Pawn my ring! My father gave it me." She kissed it tenderly; yet, to Vizard, half defiantly.

"Pawning is not selling, goose," said he, getting angry.

"But I must have parted with it."

"And you preferred to *starve?*"

"I preferred to starve," said she steadily.

He looked at her. Her eyes faced his. He muttered something, and walked away three steps to hide unreasonable sympathy. He came back with a grand display of cheerfulness. "Your mother will be here next month," said he, "with money in both pockets. Meantime I wish you would let me have a finger in the pie; or, rather, my sister. She is warm-hearted and enthusiastic; she shall call on you if you will permit it."

"Is she like you?"

"Not a bit; we are by different mothers. Hers was a Greek, and she is a beautiful dark girl."

"I admire beauty; but is she like you—in—in—disposition?"

"Lord! no; very superior. Not abominably clever like you; but absurdly good. You shall judge for yourself. Oblige me with your address."

The doctress wrote her address with a resigned air, as one who had found somebody she had to obey; and, as soon as he had got it, Vizard gave her a sort of nervous shake of the hand, and seemed almost in a hurry to get away from her. But this was his way.

She would have been amazed if she had seen his change of manner the moment he got amongst his own people.

He burst in on them crying, "There—the prayers of this

congregation are requested for Harrington Vizard, saddled with a virago."

"Saddled with a virago!" screamed Fanny.

"Saddled with a——!" sighed Zoe faintly.

"Saddled with a virago FOR LIFE!" shouted Vizard, with a loud defiance, that seemed needless, since nobody was objecting violently to his being saddled.

"Look here," said he, descending all of a sudden to a meek, injured air, which, however, did not last very long; "I was in the garden of Leicester Square, and a young lady turned faint. I observed it, and instead of taking the hint, and cutting, I offered assistance—off my guard, as usual. She declined. I persisted; proposed a glass of wine or spirit. She declined, but at last let out she was starving."

"Oh!" cried Zoe.

"Yes, Zoe—starving. A woman more learned, more scientific, more eloquent, more offensive to a fellow's vanity, than I ever saw, or even read of—a woman of *genius*, starving, like a genius and a ninny, with a ring on her finger worth thirty guineas. But my learned goose would not raise money on that, because it was her father's, and he is dead."

"Poor thing!" said Zoe, and her eyes glistened directly.

"It *is* hard, Zoe; isn't it? She is a physician—an able physician; has studied at Zurich, and at Edinburgh, and in France, and has a French diploma, but must not practise in England, because we are behind the Continent in laws and civilisation—so *she* says, confound her impudence, and my folly for becoming a woman's echo! But if I were to tell you her whole story, your blood would boil at the trickery, and dishonesty, and oppression of the trades-union, which has driven this gifted creature to a foreign school for education, and now that a foreign nation admits her ability and crowns her with honour, still she must not practise in this country because she is a woman and we are a nation of half-civilised men. That is *her* chat, you understand, not mine. We are not obliged to swallow all that; but turn it how you will, here are learning, genius, and virtue starving. We must get her to accept a little money: that means, in her case, a little fire and food. Zoe, shall that woman go to bed hungry to-night?"

"No; never!" said Zoe warmly. "Let me think. Offer her a *loan*."

"Well done; that is a good idea. Will *you* undertake it? She will be far more likely to accept. She is a bit of a prude and all, is my virago."

"Yes, dear, she will. Order the carriage. She shall not go to bed hungry—nobody shall that you are interested in."

"Oh, after dinner will do."

Dinner was ordered immediately, and the brougham an hour after.

At dinner Vizard gave them all the outline of the Edinburgh struggle, and the *pros* and *cons;* during which narrative his female hearers might have been observed to get cooler and cooler, till they reached the zero of perfect apathy. They listened in dead silence; but when Harrington had done, Fanny said aside to Zoe, "It is all her own fault. What business have women to set up for doctors?"

"Of course not," said Zoe; "only we must not say so. He indulges *us* in our whims."

Warm partisan of immortal justice when it was lucky enough to be backed by her affections, Miss Vizard rose directly after dinner, and, with a fine imitation of ardour, said she could lose no more time—she must go and put on her bonnet. "You will come with me, Fanny?"

When I was a girl; or a boy; I forget which—it is so long ago—a young lady, thus invited by her affectionate friend, used to do one of two things: nine times out of ten she sacrificed her inclination, and went; the tenth, she would make sweet, engaging excuses, and beg off. But the girls of this day have invented "silent volition." When you ask them to do anything they don't quite like, they look you in the face bland, but full, and neither speak nor move. Miss Dover was a proficient in this graceful form of refusal by dead silence, and resistance by placid inertia. She just looked like the full moon in Zoe's face, and never budged. Zoe, being also a girl of the day, needed no interpretation. "Oh, very well," said she, "disobliging Thing"—with perfect good-humour, mind you.

Vizard, however, was not pleased.

"You go with her, Ned," said he. "Miss Dover prefers to stay and smoke a cigar with me."

Miss Dover's face reddened, but she never budged. And it ended in Zoe taking Severne with her to call on Rhoda Gale.

Rhoda Gale stayed in the garden till sunset, and then went to her lodgings slowly, for they had no attraction—a dark room; no supper; a hard landlady, half disposed to turn her out.

Dr. Rhoda Gale never reflected much in the streets—they were to her a field of minute observation; but when she got home, she sat down and thought over what she had been saying and doing, and puzzled over the character of the man who had relieved her hunger and elicited her autobiography. She passed him in review; settled in her mind that he was a strong character—a manly man, who did not waste words; wondered a little at the way he had made her do whatever he pleased; blushed a little at the thought of having been so communicative, yet admired the man for having drawn her out so, and wondered whether she should see him again. She hoped she should. But she did not feel sure.

She sat half an hour thus—with one knee raised a little, and her hands interlaced—by a fireplace with a burnt-out coal in it; and by-and-by she felt hungry again. But she had no food, and no money.

She looked hard at her ring, and profited a little by contact with the sturdy good sense of Vizard.

She said to herself, "Men understand one another. I believe father would be angry with me for not."

Then she looked tenderly and wistfully at the ring, and kissed it, and murmured, "Not to-night." You see she hoped she might have a letter in the morning, and so respite her ring.

Then she made light of it, and said to herself, "No matter; *qui dort dîne.*"

But as it was early for bed, and she could not be long idle, sipping no knowledge, she took up the last good German work that she had bought when she had money, and proceeded to read. She had no candle, but she had a lucifer-match or two, and an old newspaper. With this she made long spills, and lighted one, and read two pages by that paper torch; and lighted another before it was out, and then another, and so on in succession, fighting for knowledge against poverty, as she had fought for it against perfidy.

While she was thus absorbed, a carriage drew up at the door. She took no notice of that; but presently there was a rustling of silk on the stairs, and two voices, and then a

tap at the door. "Come in," said she—and Zoe entered just as the last spill burned out.

Rhoda Gale rose in a dark room; but a gaslight over the way just showed her figure. "Miss Gale?" said Zoe timidly.

"I am Miss Gale," said Rhoda quietly, but firmly.

"I am Miss Vizard, the gentleman's sister that you met in Leicester Square to-day;" and she took a cautious step towards her.

Rhoda's cheeks burned.

"Miss Vizard," she said, "excuse my receiving you so; but you may have heard I am very poor. My last candle is gone. But perhaps the landlady would lend me one. I don't know. She is very disobliging, and very cruel."

"Then she shall not have the honour of lending you a candle," said Zoe, with one of her gushes. "Now, to tell the truth," said she, altering to the cheerful, "I'm rather glad. I would rather talk to you in the dark, for a little, just at first. May I?" By this time she had gradually crept up to Rhoda.

"I am afraid you *must*," said Rhoda. "But, at least, I can offer you a seat."

Zoe sat down, and there was an awkward silence.

"Oh dear," said Zoe: "I don't know how to begin. I wish you would give me your hand, as I can't see your face."

"With all my heart: there."

(Almost in a whisper) "He has told me."

Rhoda put the other hand to her face, though it was so dark.

"Oh, Miss Gale, how *could* you? Only think! Suppose you had killed yourself, or made yourself very ill. Your mother would have come directly and found you so; and only think how unhappy you would have made her!"

"Can I have forgotten my mother?" asked Rhoda of herself, but aloud.

"Not wilfully, I am sure. But you know geniuses are not always wise in these little things. They want some good humdrum soul to advise them in the common affairs of life. That want is supplied you now, for I am here; ha! ha!"

"You are no more commonplace than I am; much less now, I'll be bound."

"We will put that to the test," said Zoe, adroitly enough. "*My* view of all this is—that here is a young lady in want

of money *for a time*, as everybody is, now and then, and that the sensible course is to borrow some, till your mother comes over with her apron full of dollars. Now I have twenty pounds to lend, and if you are so mighty sensible as you say, you won't refuse to borrow it."

"Oh, Miss Vizard, you are very good; but I am afraid and ashamed to borrow. I never did such a thing."

"Time you began, then. *I* have—often. But it is no use arguing. You *must*—or you will get poor me finely scolded. Perhaps he was on his good behaviour with you, being a stranger; but at home they expect to be obeyed. He will be sure to say it was my stupidity, and that *he* would have made you directly."

"Do tell!" cried Rhoda, surprised into an idiom; "as if I'd have taken money from *him*."

"Why, of course not; but between *us* it is nothing at all. There:" and she put the money in Rhoda's hand, and then held both hand and money rather tightly imprisoned in her larger palm; and began to chatter, so as to leave the other no opening. "Oh blessed darkness, how easy it makes things! does it not? I am glad there was no candle; we should have been fencing and blushing ever so long, and made such a fuss about nothing—and——"

This prattle was interrupted by Rhoda Gale putting her right wrist round Zoe's neck, and laying her forehead on her shoulder with a little sob. So then they both distilled the inevitable dew-drops.

But as Rhoda was not much given that way, she started up, and said, "Darkness? no; I must see the face that has come here to help me, and not humiliate me. That is the first use I'll make of the money. I am afraid you are rather plain, or you couldn't be so good as all this."

"No," said Zoe, "I'm not reckoned plain. Only as black as a coal."

"All the more to my taste," said Rhoda, and flew out of the room, and nearly stumbled over a figure seated on a step of the staircase. "Who are you?" said she sharply.

"My name is Severne."

"And what are you doing there?"

"Waiting for Miss Vizard."

"Come in then."

"She told me not."

"Then I tell you *to*. The idea! Miss Vizard!"

"Yes."

"Please have Mr. Severne in. Here he is, sitting—like grief—on the steps. I will soon be back."

She flew to the landlady. "Mrs. Grip, I want a candle."

"Well, the shops are open," said the woman rudely.

"Oh, I have no time. Here is a sovereign. Please give me two candles directly, candlesticks and all."

The woman's manner changed directly.

"You shall have them this moment, miss, and my own candlesticks, which they are plated."

She brought them, and advised her only to light one. "They don't carry well, miss," said she. "They are wax—or summat."

"Then they are summat," said Miss Gale, after a single glance at their composition.

"I'll make you a nice hot supper, miss, in half-an-hour," said the woman maternally, as if she was going to *give* it her.

"No thank you. Bring me a twopenny loaf, and a scuttle of coals."

"La, miss! no more than that—out of a sov'?"

"Yes—THE CHANGE."

Having shown Mrs. Grip her father was a Yankee, she darted upstairs with her candles. Zoe came to meet her, and literally dazzled her.

Rhoda stared at her with amazement and growing rapture. "Oh, you beauty!" she cried, and drank her in from head to foot.

"Well," said she, drawing a long breath, "Nature, you have turned out a *com*-plete article this time, I reckon." Then, as Severne laughed merrily at this, she turned her candle and her eyes full on him very briskly. She looked at him for a moment, with a gratified eye at his comeliness; then she started. "Oh!" she cried.

He received the inspection merrily, till she uttered that ejaculation, then he started a little and stared at her.

"We have met before," said she, almost tenderly.

"Have we?" said he, putting on a mystified air.

She fixed him, and looked him through and through. "You—don't—remember—me?" asked she. Then, after giving him plenty of time to answer, "Well, then, I must be mistaken;" and her words seemed to freeze themselves and her as they fell.

She turned her back on him, and said to Zoe, with a good

deal of sweetness and weight, "I have lived to see goodness and beauty united. I will never despair of human nature."

This was too point-blank for Zoe; she blushed crimson, and said archly, "I think it is time for me to run. Oh, but I forgot; here is my card; we are all at that hotel. If I am so very attractive, you will come and see me. We leave town very soon; will you?"

"I will," said Rhoda.

"And since you took me for an old acquaintance, I hope you will treat me as one," said Severne, with consummate grace and assurance.

"I will, *sir*," said she icily, and with a marvellous curl of the lip that did not escape him.

She lighted them down the stairs, gazed after Zoe, and ignored Severne altogether.

CHAPTER XVII

Going home in the carriage Zoe was silent, but Severne talked nineteen to the dozen. Had his object been to hinder his companion's mind from dwelling too long on one thing, he could not have rattled the dice of small talk more industriously. His words would fill pages; his topics were that Miss Gale was an extraordinary woman, but too masculine for his taste, and had made her own troubles setting up doctress, when her true line was governess—for boys. He was also glib and satirical upon that favourite butt, a friend.

"Who but a *soi-disant* woman-hater would pick up a strange virago, and send his sister to her with twenty pounds? I'll tell you what it is, Miss Vizard——"

Here Miss Vizard, who had sat dead silent under a flow of words, which is merely indicated above, laid her hand on his arm to stop the flux for a moment, and said quietly—"*Do* you know her?—tell me."

"Know her!—how should I?"

"I thought you might have met her—abroad."

"Well, it is possible, of course, but very unlikely. If I did, I never spoke to her, or I should have remembered her. *Don't you think so?*"

"She seemed very positive; and I think she is an accurate person. She seemed quite surprised and mortified when you said 'No.'"

"Well, you know, of course it *is* a mortifying thing when a lady claims a gentleman's acquaintance, and the gentleman doesn't admit it. But what could I do? I couldn't tell a lie about it—could I?"

"Of course not."

"I was off my guard and rudish; but you were not. What tact!—what delicacy!—what high breeding and angelic benevolence!—and so clever too!"

"Oh, fie! you listened!"

"You left the door ajar, and I could not bear to lose a word that dropped from those lips so near me. Yes, I listened, and got such a lesson as only a noble, gentle lady could give. I shall never forget your womanly art, and the way you contrived to make the benefaction sound nothing. 'We are all of us at low water in turns, and for a time, especially me, Zoe Vizard; so here's a trifling loan.' A loan!—you'll never see a shilling of it again! No matter. What do angels want of money?"

"Oh, pray," said Zoe, "you make me blush."

"Then I wish there was more light to see it—yes, an angel; do you think I can't see you have done all this for a lady you do not really approve? Fancy! A she-doctor!"

"My dear friend," said Zoe, with a little juvenile pomposity, "one ought not to judge one's intellectual superiors hastily, and this lady is ours;" then gliding back to herself—"and it is my nature to approve what those I love approve; when it is not downright wrong, you know."

"Oh, of course, it is not wrong; but is it wise?"

Zoe did not answer: the question puzzled her.

"Come," said he, "I'll be frank, and speak out in time. I don't think you know your brother Harrington. He is very inflammable."

"Inflammable!—what! Harrington? Well, yes—for I've seen smoke issue from his mouth—ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha! I'll pass that off for mine, some day when you are not by. But, seriously, your brother is the very man to make a fool of himself with a certain kind of woman. He despises the whole sex—in theory; and he is very hard upon ordinary women, and does not appreciate their good qualities. But when he meets a remarkable woman he

catches fire like tow. He fell in love with Mademoiselle Klosking."

"Oh! not in love."

"I beg your pardon. Now this is between you and me—he was in love with her—madly in love. He was only saved by our coming away. If those two had met, and made acquaintance, he would have been at her mercy. I don't say any harm would have come of it; but I do say that would have depended on the woman, and not on the man."

Zoe looked very serious, and said nothing. But her long silence showed him his words had told.

"And now," said he, after a judicious pause, "here is another remarkable woman; the last in the world I should fancy—or Vizard either, perhaps, if he met her in society. But the whole thing occurs in the way to catch him. He finds a lady fainting with hunger. He feeds her; and that softens his heart to her. Then she tells him the old story—victim of the world's injustice—and he is deeply interested in her. She can see that; she is as keen as a razor. If those two meet a few more times, he will be at her mercy: and then she will throw physic to the dogs, and jump at a husband six feet high, and twelve thousand acres. I don't study women with a microscope, as our woman-hater does; but I notice a few things about them; and one is that their eccentricities all give way at the first offer of marriage. I believe they are only adopted in desperation, to get married. What beautiful woman is ever eccentric? catch her; she can get a husband without. That doctress will prescribe Harrington a wedding-ring; and, if he swallows it, it will be her last prescription; she will send out for the family doctor after that, like other wives."

"You alarm me," said Zoe. "Pray do not make me unjust. This is a lady with a fine mind; and not a designing woman."

"Oh, I don't say she has laid any plans; but these things are always extemporised the moment the chance comes. You can count beforehand on the instincts of every woman who is clever and needy, and on Vizard's peculiar weakness for women out of the common. He is hard upon the whole sex; but he is no match for individuals. He owns as much himself. You are not angry with me?"

"No, no. Angry with *you?*"

"It is you I think of in all this. He is a fine fellow, and

you are proud of him. I wouldn't have him marry to mortify you. For myself, while the sister honours me with her regard I really don't much care who has the brother and the acres. I have the best of the bargain."

Zoe disputed this—in order to make him say it several times.

He did, and proved it in terms that made her cheeks red with modesty and gratified pride; and by the time they had got home, he had flattered everything but pride, love, and happiness out of her heart, poor girl.

The world is like the Law, full of implied contracts; we give and take, without openly agreeing to: subtle Severne counted on this, and was not disappointed; Zoe rewarded him for his praises, and her happiness, by falling into his views about Rhoda Gale. Only she did it in her own ladylike way, and not plump.

She came up to Harrington, and kissed him, and said, "Thank you, dear, for sending me on a good errand. I found her in a very mean apartment, without fire or candle."

"I thought as much," said Vizard. "Did she take the money?"

"Yes; as a loan."

"Make any difficulties?"

"A little, dear."

Severne put in his word. "Now, if you want to know all the tact and delicacy with which it was done, you must come to me; for Miss Vizard is not going to give you any idea of it."

"Be quiet, sir, or I shall be very angry. I lent her the money, dear, and her troubles are at an end; for her mother will certainly join her before she has spent your twenty pounds. Oh, and she had not parted with her ring; that is a comfort, is it not?"

"You are a good-hearted girl, Zoe," said Vizard approvingly; then, recovering himself, "but don't you be blinded by sentiment. She deserves a good hiding for not parting with her ring. Where is the sense of starving with thirty pounds on your finger?"

Zoe smiled, and said his words were harder than his deeds.

"Because he doesn't mean a word he says," put in Fanny Dover, uneasy at the long cessation of her tongue, for all conversation with Don Cigar had proved impracticable.

"Are you there still, my Lady Disdain?" said Vizard. "I thought you were gone to bed."

"You might well think that. I had nothing to keep me up."

Said Zoe, rather smartly, "Oh, yes, you had—Curiosity;" then, turning to her brother, "in short, you may make your mind quite easy. You have lent your money, or given it, to a worthy person, but a little wrong-headed. However"—with a telegraphic glance at Severne—"she is very accomplished; a linguist; she need never be in want; and she will soon have her mother to help her and advise her: perhaps Mrs. Gale has an income; if not, Miss Gale, with her abilities, will easily find a place in some house of business, or else take to teaching. If I was them I would set up a school."

Unanimity is rare in this world; but Zoe's good sense carried every vote. Her prompter, Severne, nodded approval. Fanny said, "Why, of course;" and Vizard, who, it was feared, might prove refractory, assented even more warmly than the others. "Yes," said he, "that will be the end of it. You relieve me of a weight. Really, when she told me that fable of learning maltreated, honourable ambition punished, justice baffled by trickery, and virtue vilified, and did not cry like the rest of you, except at her father dying in New York the day she won her diploma at Montpelier, I forgave the poor girl her petticoats—indeed I lost sight of them: she seemed to me a very brave little fellow, damnably ill used; and I said, 'This is not to be borne; here is a fight, and justice down under dirty feet.' What, ho!" —(roaring at the top of his voice.)

Zoe and Fanny (screaming and pinching each other). "Ah! ah!"

"Vizard to the rescue!"

"But, with the evening, cool reflection came. A sister, youthful, but suddenly sagacious (with a gleam of suspicion), very suddenly, has stilled the waves of romance, and the lips of beauty have uttered common-sense. Shall they utter it in vain? Never! It may be years before they do it again. We must not slight rare phenomena. Zoe *locuta est.* Eccentricity must be suppressed. Doctresses, warned by a little starvation, must take the world as it is, and teach little girls and boys languages, and physic them with arithmetic and the globes: these be drugs that do not kill; they only make life a burden. I don't think we have laid out our twenty

pounds badly, Zoe, and there is an end of it." The incident is emptied, as the French say, and (lighting bed candles) the ladies retire with the honours of war. "Zoe has uttered good sense, and Miss Dover has done the next best thing, she has said very little——"

Miss Dover shot in contemptuously, "I had no companion——"

"For want of a fool to speak her mind to."

CHAPTER XVIII

Ingenious Mr. Severne having done his best to detach the poor doctress from Vizard and his family, in which the reader probably discerns his true motive, now bent his mind on slipping back to Homburg and looking after his money. Not that he liked the job: to get hold of it he knew he must condense rascality; he must play the penitent, the lover, and the scoundrel over again, all in three days.

Now, though his egotism was brutal, he was human in this, that he had plenty of good-nature skin-deep, and superficial sensibilities, which made him shrink a little from this hot-pressed rascality and barbarity. On the other hand, he was urged by poverty, and, laughable as it may appear, by jealousy. He had observed that the best of women, if they are not only abandoned by him they love, but also flattered and adored by scores, will sometimes yield to the joint attacks of desolation, pique, vanity, &c.

In this state of fluctuation he made up his mind so far as this: he would manage so as to be able to go.

Even this demanded caution. So he began by throwing out, in a seeming careless way, that he ought to go down into Huntingdonshire.

"Of course you ought," said Vizard.

No objection was taken, and they rather thought he would go next day. But that was not his game. It would never do to go whilst they were in London. So he kept postponing, and saying he would not tear himself away; and at last, the day before they were to go down to Barfordshire, he affected to yield to a remonstrance of Vizard, and said he would see them off, then run down to Huntingdonshire, look into his affairs, and cross the country to Barfordshire.

"You might take Homburg on the way," said Fanny, out of fun—*her* fun—not really meaning it.

Severne cast a piteous look at Zoe. "For shame, Fanny!" said she. "And why put Homburg into his head?"

"When I had forgotten there was such a place," said Mr. Severne, taking his cue dexterously from Zoe, and feigning innocent amazement. Zoe coloured with pleasure. This was at breakfast. At afternoon tea something happened. The ladies were upstairs packing, an operation on which they can bestow as many hours as the thing needs minutes. One servant brought in the tea; another came in soon after with a card, and said it was for Miss Vizard; but he brought it to Harrington. He read it:

"Miss Rhoda Gale, M.D."

"Send it up to Miss Vizard," said he. The man was going out: he stopped him, and said, "You can show the lady in here, all the same."

Rhoda Gale was ushered in. She had a new gown and bonnet, not showy, but very nice. She coloured faintly at sight of the two gentlemen; but Vizard soon put her at her ease. He shook hands with her, and said—"Sit down, Miss Gale; my sister will soon be here. I have sent your card up to her."

"Shall I tell her?" said Severne, with the manner of one eager to be agreeable to the visitor.

"If you please, sir," said Miss Gale.

Severne went out zealously, darted up to Zoe's room, knocked, and said—"Pray come down: here is that doctress."

Meantime, Jack was giving Jill the card, and Jill was giving it Mary to give to the lady. It got to Zoe's room in a quarter of an hour.

"Any news from mamma?" asked Vizard, in his blunt way.

"Yes, sir."

"Good news?"

"No. My mother writes me that I must not expect her. She has to fight with a dishonest executor. Oh, money, money!"

At that moment Zoe entered the room, but Severne paced the landing. He did not care to face Miss Gale; and even in that short interval of time he had persuaded Zoe to pro-

tect her brother against this formidable young lady, and shorten the interview if she could.

So Zoe entered the room bristling with defence of her brother. At sight of her, Miss Gale rose, and her features literally shone with pleasure. This was rather disarming to one so amiable as Zoe, and she was surprised into smiling sweetly in return; but still her quick defensive eye drank Miss Gale on the spot, and saw, with alarm, the improvement in her appearance. She was very healthy, as indeed she deserved to be; for she was singularly temperate, drank nothing but water and weak tea without sugar, and never ate nor drank except at honest meals. Her youth and pure constitution had shaken off her late pallor, and the pleasure of seeing Zoe lent her a lovely colour. Zoe microscoped her in one moment: not one beautiful feature in her whole face; eyes full of intellect, but not in the least love-darting; nose, an aquiline steadily reversed; mouth, vastly expressive, but large; teeth, even and white, but ivory, not pearl; chin, ordinary; head symmetrical, and set on with grace. I may add, to complete the picture, that she had a way of turning this head, clean, swift, and bird-like, without turning her body. That familiar action of hers was fine—so full of fire and intelligence.

Zoe settled in one moment that she was downright plain, but might probably be that mysterious and incomprehensible and dangerous creature, "a gentleman's beauty," which, to women, means no beauty at all, but a witch-like creature, that goes and hits foul, and eclipses real beauty, doll's to wit, by some mysterious magic.

"Pray sit down," said Zoe formally. Rhoda sat down and hesitated a moment. She felt a frost.

Vizard helped her—"Miss Gale has heard from her mother."

"Yes, Miss Vizard," said Rhoda timidly: "and very bad news. She cannot come at present; and I am so distressed at what I have done in borrowing that money of you; and see, I have spent nearly three pounds of it in dress; but I have brought the rest back."

Zoe looked at her brother, perplexed.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Vizard; "you will not take it, Zoe."

"Oh yes; if you please, do," said Rhoda still to Zoe. "When I borrowed it, I felt sure I could repay it; but it is not so now. My mother says it may be months before she

can come, and she forbids me positively to go to her. Oh! but for that I'd put on boy's clothes and go as a common sailor to get to her."

Vizard fidgeted on his chair.

"I suppose I mustn't go in a passion," said he drily.

"Who cares?" said Miss Gale, turning her head sharply on him in the way I have tried to describe.

"I care," said Vizard. "I find wrath interfere with my digestion. Please go on, and tell us what your mother says. She has more common-sense than somebody else I won't name—politeness forbids."

"Well, who doubts that?" said the lady, with frank good-humour. "Of course, she has more sense than any of us. Well, my mother says—oh, Miss Vizard!"

"No, she doesn't, now. She never heard the name of Vizard."

Miss Gale was in no humour for feeble jokes. She turned half angrily away from him to Zoe. "She says I have been well educated, and know languages; and we both are under a cloud, and I had better give up all thought of Medicine, and take to teaching."

"Well, Miss Gale," said Zoe, "if you ask *me*, I must say I think it is good advice. With all your gifts, how can you fight the world? We are all interested in you here; and it is a curious thing, but do you know we agreed the other day you would have to give up Medicine, and fall into some occupation in which there are many ladies already to keep you in countenance. Teaching was mentioned, I think; was it not, Harrington?"

Rhoda Gale sighed deeply.

"I am not surprised," said she. "Most women of the world think with you. But oh, Miss Vizard, please take into account all that I have done and suffered for Medicine. Is all that to go for *nothing?* Think what a bitter thing it must be to do, and then to undo—to labour and study, and then knock it all down; to cut a slice out of one's life—out of the very heart of it—and throw it clean away. I know it is hard for you to enter into the feelings of any one who loves science and is told to desert it. But suppose you had loved a *man* you were proud of—loved him for five years—and then they came to you and said, 'There are difficulties in the way; he is as worthy as ever, and he will never desert *you;* but you must give *him* up, and try and get a taste for human rubbish; it will only be five years of wasted life,

wasted youth, wasted seed-time, wasted affection, and then a long vegetable life of unavailing regrets.' I love science as other women love men. If I am to give up science, why not die? Then I shall not feel my loss; and I know how to die without pain. Oh! the world is cruel. Ah! I am too unfortunate! Everybody else is rewarded for patience, prudence, temperance, industry, and a life with high and almost holy aims; but I am punished, afflicted, crushed under the injustice of the day. Do not make me a nursemaid. I *won't* be a governess; and I must not die, because that would grieve my mother. Have pity on me! —have pity!"

She trembled all over, and stretched out her hands to Zoe with truly touching supplication.

Zoe forgot her part, or lost the power to play it well. She turned her head away and would not assent: but two large tears rolled out of her beautiful eyes. Miss Gale, who had risen in the ardour of her appeal, saw that, and it set her off. She leaned her brow against the mantlepiece, not like a woman, but a brave boy, that does not want to be seen crying; and she faltered out, "In France I am a learned physician: and here to be a housemaid! for I won't live on borrowed money. I am very unfortunate."

Severne, who had lost patience, came swiftly in, and found them in this position, and Vizard walking impatiently about the room in a state of emotion, which he was pleased to call anger.

Zoe, in a tearful voice, said, "I am unable to advise you. It is very hard that any one so deserving should be degraded."

Vizard burst out, "It is harder the world should be so full of conventional sneaks; and that I was very near making one of them. The last thing we ever think of, in this paltry world, is justice, and it ought to be the first. Well, for once I have got the power to be just, and just I'll be, by God! Come, leave off snivelling, you two, and take a lesson in justice—from a beginner: converts are always the hottest, you know. Miss Gale, you shall not be driven out of science, and your life and labour wasted. You shall doctor Barfordshire, and teach it English, too, if any woman can. This is the programme. I farm two hundred acres—*vicariously*, of course. Nobody in England has brains to do anything *himself*. That weakness is confined to your late father's country, and

they suffer for it by out-fighting, out-lying, out-manœuvring, out-bullying, and out-witting us whenever we encounter them. Well, the farmhouse is large. The bailiff has no children: there is a wing furnished and not occupied. You shall live there, with the right of cutting vegetables, roasting chickens, sucking eggs, and riding a couple of horses off their legs."

"But what am I to do for all that?"

"Oh, only the work of two men. You must keep my house in perfect health. The servants have a trick of eating till they burst. You have to sew them up again. There are only seven hundred people in the village. You must cure them all? and, if you do, I promise you their lasting ingratitude. Outside the village, you must make them pay—*if you can.* We will find you patients of every degree. But whether you will get any fees out of them, this deponent sayeth not. However, I can answer for the *ladies* of our county, that they will all cheat you—if they can."

Miss Gale's colour came and went, her eyes sparkled. "Oh, how good you are! Is there a hospital?"

"County hospital and infirmary within three miles. Fine country for disease. Intoxication prevalent, leading to a bountiful return of accidents. I promise you wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores, and everything to make you comfortable."

"Oh, don't laugh at me. I am so afraid I shall—no, I hope I shall not disgrace you. And then it is against the law; but I don't mind that."

"Of course not. What is the law to ladies with elevated views? By-the-bye, what is the penalty?—six months?"

"Oh no. Twenty pounds. Oh dear! another twenty pounds!"

"Make your mind easy. Unjust laws are a dead letter on a soil so primitive as ours. I shall talk to Uxmoor, and a few more, and no magistrate will ever summons you, nor jury convict you, in Barfordshire. You will be as safe there as in Upper Canada. Now then—attend. We leave for Barfordshire to-morrow. You will go down on the 1st of next month. By that time all will be ready: start for Taddington, eleven o'clock. You will be met at the Taddington station, and taken to your farm-house. You will find a fire ten days old, and, for once in your life, young lady, you will find an aired bed; because my man Harris will be housemaid, and not let one of your homicidal sex set foot in the crib."

Miss Gale looked from Vizard to his sister, like a person in a dream. She was glowing with happiness: but it did not spoil her. She said, humbly and timidly, "I hope I may prove worthy."

"That is *your* business," said Vizard, with supreme indifference: "mine is to be just. Have a cup of tea?"

"Oh no, thank you: and it will be a great part of my duty to object to afternoon tea. But I am afraid none of you will mind me."

After a few more words, in which Severne, seeing Vizard was in one of his iron moods, and immovable as him of Rhodes, affected now to be a partisan of the new arrangement —Miss Gale rose to retire. Severne ran before her to the door, and opened it, as to a queen. She bowed formally to him as she went out: when she was on the other side the door, she turned her head in her sharp fiery way, and pointed with her finger to the emerald ring on his little finger, a very fine one—"Changed hands," said she; "it was on the third finger of your left hand when we met last;" and she passed down the stairs with a face half turned to him, and a cruel smile.

Severne stood fixed, looking after her; cold crept among his bones: he was roused by a voice above him saying very inquisitively, "What does she say?" He looked up, and it was Fanny Dover leaning over the balusters of the next landing. She had evidently seen all, and heard some: Severne had no means of knowing how much. His heart beat rapidly. Yet he told her boldly, that the doctress had admired his emerald ring. As if to give greater force to his explanation, he took it off and showed it her, very amicably. He calculated that she should hardly, at that distance, have heard every syllable, and, at the same time, he was sure she had seen Miss Gale point at the ring.

"Hum!" said Fanny, and that was all she said.

Severne went to his own room to think. He was almost dizzy. He dreaded this Rhoda Gale. She was incomprehensible, and held a sword over his head. Tongues go fast in the country. At the idea of this keen girl and Zoe Vizard sitting under a tree for two hours, with nothing to do but talk, his blood ran cold. Surely Miss Gale must hate him. She would not always spare him. For once he could not see his way clear. Should he tell her half the truth, and throw himself on her mercy? Should he make love to her? or what should he do? One thing he saw clear enough: he

must not quit the field. Sooner or later all would depend on his presence, his tact, and his ready wit.

He felt like a man who could not swim, and wades in deepening water. He must send somebody to Homburg, or abandon all thought of his money. Why abandon it? Why not return to Ina Klosking? His judgment, alarmed at the accumulating difficulties, began to intrude its voice. What was he turning his back on? A woman, lovely, loving, and celebrated, who was very likely pining for him, and would share not only her winnings at play with him, but the large income she would make by her talent. What was he following? A woman divinely lovely and good, but whom he could not possess, or, if he did, could not hold her long, and whose love must end in horror.

But nature is not so unfair to honest men, as to give wisdom to the cunning. Rarely does reason prevail against passion in such a mind as Severne's. It ended, as might have been expected, in his going down to Vizard Court with Zoe.

An express train soon whirled them down to Taddington, in Barfordshire. There was Harris, with three servants, waiting for them—one with a light cart for their luggage, and two with an open carriage and two spanking bays, whose coats shone like satin. The servants—liveried, and top-booted, and buckskin-gloved, and spruce as if just out of a bandbox—were all smartness and respectful zeal. They got the luggage out in a trice, with Harris's assistance. Mr. Harris then drove away like the wind in his dog-cart; the travelling party were soon in the barouche. It glided away, and they rolled on easy springs at the rate of twelve miles an hour till they came to the lodge-gate. It was opened at their approach, and they drove full half a mile over a broad gravel path, with rich grass on each side, and grand old patriarchs, oak and beech, standing here and there, and dappled deer, grazing or lying, in mottled groups, till they came to a noble avenue of lofty lime-trees, with stems of rare size and smoothness, and towering piles on piles of translucent leaves, that glowed in the sun like flakes of gold.

At the end of this avenue was seen an old mansion, built of that beautiful clean red brick—which seems to have died out—and white stone-facings and mullions, with gables and oriel windows by the dozen; but between the avenue and the house was a very large oval plot of turf, with a broad gravel road running round it; and attached to the house, but thrown a little back, were the stables, which formed three sides of a

good-sized quadrangle, with an enormous clock in the centre. The lawn, kitchen-garden, ice-houses, pineries, greenhouses, revealed themselves only in peeps as the carriage swept round the spacious plot, and drew up at the hall-door.

No ringing of bells nor knocking. Even as the coachman tightened his reins, the great hall-door was swung open, and two footmen appeared; Harris brought up a rear-guard, and received the party in due state.

A double staircase, about ten feet broad, rose out of the hall, and up this Mr. Harris conducted Severne, the only stranger, into a bedroom with a great oriel window looking west.

"This is your room, sir," said he. "Shall I unpack your things when they come?"

Severne assented, and that perfect major-domo informed him that luncheon was ready, and retired cat-like, and closed the door so softly, no sound was heard.

Mr. Severne looked about him, and admitted to himself that, with all his experiences of life, this was his first bedroom. It was of great size, to begin. The oriel window was twenty feet wide, and had half-a-dozen casements, each with rose-coloured blinds, though some of them needed no blinds, for green creepers, with flowers like clusters of grapes, curled round the mullions, and the sun shone mellowed through their leaves. Enormous curtains of purple cloth, with gold borders, hung at each side in mighty folds, to be drawn at night-time when the eye should need repose from feasting upon colour.

There were three brass bedsteads in a row, only four feet broad, with spring beds, hair mattresses a foot thick, and snowy sheets for coverlets, instead of counterpanes; so that, if you were hot, feverish, or sleepless in one bed, you might try another, or two.

Thick carpets and rugs, satin-wood wardrobes, prodigious wash-hand stands, with china backs four feet high. Towel-horses nearly as big as a donkey, with short towels, long towels, thick towels, thin towels, bathing sheets, &c.; baths of every shape, and cans of every size; a large knee-hole table; paper and envelopes of every size. In short, a room to sleep in, study in, live in, and stick fast in, night and day.

But what is this? A Gothic arch, curtained with violet merino. He draws the curtain. It is an ante-room. One half of it is a bath-room, screened, and paved with encaustic tiles that ran up the walls, so you may splash to your heart's

content. The rest is a studio, and contains a choice little library of well-bound books in glass cases, a pianoforte, and a harmonium. Severne tried them, they were both in perfect tune. Two clocks, one in each room, were also in perfect time. Thereat he wondered. But the truth is, it was a house wherein precision reigned; a tuner and a clock-maker visited it by contract every month.

This, and two more guest-chambers, and the great dining-hall, were built under the Plantagenets, when all large land-owners entertained kings and princes with their retinues. As to that part of the house which was built under the Tudors, there are hundreds of country-houses as important, only Mr. Severne had not been inside them, and was hardly aware to what perfection rational luxury is brought in the houses of our large landed gentry. He sat down in an antique chair of enormous size; the back went higher than his head, the seat ran out as far as his ankle, when seated; there was room in it for two, and it was stuffed—ye gods, how it was stuffed! The sides, the back, and the seat were all hair mattresses, a foot thick at least. Here nestled our sybarite, with the sun shining through leaves, and splashing his beautiful head with golden tints and transparent shadows, and felt in the temple of comfort, and incapable of leaving it alive.

He went down to luncheon. It was distinguishable from dinner in this, that they all got up after it, and Zoe said, "Come with me, children."

Fanny and Severne rose at the word. Vizard said he felt excluded from that invitation, having cut his wise-teeth—so he would light a cigar instead; and he did. Zoe took the other two into the kitchen-garden; four acres, surrounded with a high wall of orange-red brick, full of little holes where the nails had been. Zoe, being now at home, and queen, wore a new and pretty deportment. She was half maternal, and led her friend and lover about like two kids. She took them to this and that fruit-tree, set them to eat, and looked on superior. By way of climax, she led them to the south wall, crimson with ten thousand peaches and nectarines; she stepped over the border, took superb peaches and nectarines from the trees, and gave them with her own hand to Fanny and Severne. The head-gardener glared in dismay at the fair spoliator. Zoe observed him and laughed. "Poor Lucas," said she; "he would like them all to hang on the tree till they fell off with a

wasp inside. Eat as many as ever you can, young people —Lucas is amusing."

"I never had peaches enough off the tree before," said Fanny.

"No more have I," said Severne. "This must be the Elysian fields, and I shall spoil my dinner."

"Who cares?" said Fanny recklessly. "Dinner comes every day, and always at the only time when one has no appetite. But this eating of peaches—oh, what a beauty!"

"Children," said Zoe gravely, "I advise you not to eat above a dozen. Do not enter on a fatal course, which in one brief year will reduce you to a hapless condition. There—I was let loose amongst them at sixteen, and ever since they pall. But I do like to see you eat them, and your eyes sparkle."

"That is too bad of you," said Fanny, driving her white teeth deep into a peach. "The idea! Now, Mr. Severne, do my eyes sparkle?"

"Like diamonds. But that proves nothing; it is their normal condition."

"There—make him a curtsey," said Zoe, "and come along."

She took them into the village. It was one of the old sort; little detached houses with little gardens in front, in all of which were a few humble flowers, and often a dark rose of surpassing beauty. Behind each cottage was a large garden, with various vegetables, and sometimes a few square yards of wheat. There was one little row of new brick houses standing together; their number five, their name New Town. This town of five houses was tiled; the detached houses were thatched, and the walls plastered and whitewashed like snow. Such whitewash seems never to be made in towns, or to lose its whiteness in a day. This broad surface of vivid white was a background, against which the clinging roses, the clustering, creeping honeysuckles, and the deep young ivy, with its tender green and polished leaves, shone lovely: wood-smoke mounted thin and silvery from a cottage or two, that were cooking, and embroidered the air, not fouled it. The little windows had diamond panes, as in the middle ages, and every cottage door was open, suggesting hospitality and dearth of thieves. There was also that old essential, a village green; a broad strip of sacred turf, that was everybody's by custom, though in strict law Vizard's. Here a village cow and a donkey went about

grazing the edges, for the turf in general was smooth as a lawn. By the side of the green was the village ale-house. After the green other cottages; two of them

> "Quite over-canopied with lush woodbine,
> With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine."

One of these was called Mark's cottage, and the other Allen's. The rustic church stood in the middle of a hill nearly half a mile from the village. They strolled up to it. It had a tower built of flint, and clad on two sides with ivy three feet deep, and the body of the church was as snowy as the cottages, and on the south side a dozen swallows and martins had lodged their mortar nests under the eaves; they looked against the white like rugged grey stone bosses. Swallows and martins innumerable wheeled, swift as arrows, round the tower, chirping, and in and out of the church through an open window, and added their music and their motion to the beauty of the place.

Returning from the church to the village, Miss Dover lagged behind, and then Severne infused into his voice those tender tones which give amorous significance to the poorest prose.

"What an Arcadia!" said he.

"You would not like to be banished to it," said Zoe demurely.

"That depends," said he significantly.

Instead of meeting him half-way and demanding an explanation, Zoe turned coy and fell to wondering what Fanny was about.

"Oh, don't compel her to join us," said Severne. "She is meditating."

"On what? She is not much given that way."

"On her past sins: and preparing new ones."

"For shame! she is no worse than we are. Do you really admire Islip?"

"Indeed I do, if this is Islip?"

"It is then, and this cottage with the cluster rose-tree all over the walls is Mark's cottage. We are rather proud of Mark's cottage," said she timidly.

"It is a bower," said he warmly.

This encouraged Zoe, and she said, "Is there not a wonderful charm in cottages? I often think I should like to live in Mark's. Have you ever had that feeling?"

"Never; but I have it now. I should like to live in it—with you."

Zoe blushed like a rose, but turned it off. "You would soon wish yourself back at Vizard Court," said she. "Fanny! Fanny!" and she stood still.

Fanny came up. "Well, what is the matter now?" said she, with pert, yet thoroughly apathetic, indifference.

"The matter is—extravagances. Here is a man of the world pretending he would like to end his days in Mark's cottage."

"Stop a bit. It was to be with somebody I loved. And wouldn't you, Miss Dover?"

"Oh dear, no. We should be sure to quarrel cooped up in such a mite of a place. No! give me Vizard Court, and plenty of money, and the man of my heart."

"You have not got one, I'm afraid," said Zoe, "or you would not put him last."

"Why not! when he is of the last importance," said Fanny flippantly, and turned the laugh her way.

They strolled through the village together, but in the grounds of Vizard Court Fanny fairly gave them the slip. Severne saw his chance, and said tenderly—

"Did you hear what she said about a large house being best for lovers?"

"Yes, I heard her," said Zoe defensively; "but very likely she did not mean it. That young lady's words are air. She will say one thing one day, and another the next."

"I don't know. There is one thing every young lady's mind is made up about, and that is, whether it is to be love or money."

"She was for both, if I remember," said Zoe, still coldly.

"Because she is not in love."

"Well, I really believe she is not—for once."

"There, you see. She is in an unnatural condition."

"For her, very."

"So she is no judge. No; I should prefer Mark's cottage. The smaller the better; because then the woman I love could not ever be far from me."

He lowered his voice and drove the insidious words into her tender bosom. She began to tremble and heave, and defend herself feebly.

"What have I to do with that? You mustn't."

"How can I help it? You know the woman I love—I

adore; and would not the smallest cottage in England be a palace if I was blessed with her sweet love and her divine company? Oh Zoe, Zoe!"

Then she did defend herself after a fashion: "I won't listen to such——Edward!" Having uttered his name with divine tenderness, she put her hands to her blushing face and fled from him. At the head of the stairs she encountered Fanny, looking satirical; she reprimanded her.

"Fanny," said she, "you really must not do *that*"—(pause)—"out of our own grounds. Kiss me, darling. I am a happy girl." And she curled round Fanny and panted on her shoulder.

Miss Artful, known unto men as Fanny Dover, had already traced out in her own mind a line of conduct, which the above reprimand, minus the above kisses, taken at their joint algebraical value, did not disturb. The fact is, Fanny hated home; and liked Vizard Court above all places. But she was due at home, and hanging on to the Palace of Comfort by a thread. Any day her mother, out of natural affection and good breeding, might write for her; and unless one of her hosts interfered, she should have to go. But Harrington went for nothing in this, unfortunately. His hospitality was unobtrusive, but infinite. It came to him from the Plantagenets through a long line of gentlemen, who shone in vices; but inhospitality was unknown to the whole chain, and every human link in it. He might very likely forget to invite Fanny Dover, unless reminded; but when she was there, she was welcome to stay for ever if she chose. It was all one to him. He never bothered himself to amuse his guests, and so they never bored him. He never let them. He made them at home; put his people and his horses at their service; and preserved his even tenor. So then the question of Fanny's stay lay with Zoe: and Zoe would do one of two things; she would either say, with well-bred hypocrisy, she ought not to keep Fanny any longer from her mother—and so get rid of her; or would interpose and give some reason or other. What that reason would be Fanny had no precise idea. She was sure it would not be the true one; but there her insight into futurity and females ceased. Now Zoe was thoroughly fascinated by Severne, and Fanny saw it; and yet Zoe was too high-bred a girl to parade the village and the neighbourhood with him alone—and so placard her attachment—before they were engaged, and

the engagement sanctioned by the head of the house. This consideration enabled Miss Artful to make herself necessary to Zoe. Accordingly, she showed on the very first afternoon that she was prepared to play the convenient friend, and help Zoe to combine courtship with propriety.

This plan once conceived, she adhered to it with pertinacity and skill. She rode and walked with them, and in public put herself rather forward, and asserted the leader; but sooner or later, at a proper time and place, she lagged behind, or cantered ahead, and manipulated the wooing with tact and dexterity.

The consequence was that Zoe wrote of her own accord to Mrs. Dover, asking leave to detain Fanny, because her brother had invited a college friend, and it was rather awkward for her without Fanny, there being no other lady in the house at present.

She showed this to Fanny, who said earnestly—

"As long as ever you like, dear. Mamma will not miss me a bit. Make your mind easy."

Vizard, knowing his sister, and entirely deceived in Severne, exercised no vigilance; for, to do Zoe justice, none was necessary, if Severne had been the man he seemed.

There was no mother in the house to tremble for her daughter, to be jealous, to watch, to question, to demand a clear explanation—in short, to guard her young as only the mothers of creation do.

The Elysian days rolled on; Zoe was in heaven, and Severne in a fool's paradise, enjoying everything, hoping everything, forgetting everything, and fearing nothing. He had come to this, with all his cunning; he was intoxicated and blinded with passion.

Now it was that the idea of marrying Zoe first entered his head. But he was not mad enough for that. He repelled it with terror, rage, and despair. He passed an hour or two of agony in his own room, and came down, looking pale and exhausted. But, indeed, the little Dumas, though he does not pass for a moralist, says truly and well, "Les amours illégitimes portent toujours des fruits amers;" and Ned Severne's turn was come to suffer a few of the pangs he had inflicted gaily on more than one woman and her lover.

One morning at breakfast Vizard made two announcements. "Here's news," said he; "Doctor Gale writes to postpone her visit She is ill, poor girl!"

"Oh dear! what is the matter?" inquired Zoe, always kind-hearted.

"Gastritis—so she says."

"What is that?" inquired Fanny.

Mr. Severne, who was much pleased at this opportune illness, could not restrain his humour, and said it was a disorder produced by the fumes of gas.

Zoe, accustomed to believe this gentleman's lies, and not giving herself time to think, said there was a great escape in the passage the night she went there.

Then there was a laugh at her simplicity. She joined in it, but shook her finger at Master Severne.

Vizard then informed Zoe that Lord Uxmoor had been staying some time at Basildon Hall, about nine miles off; so he had asked him to come over for a week, and he had accepted. "He will be here to dinner," said Vizard. He then rang the bell and sent for Harris, and ordered him to prepare the blue chamber for Lord Uxmoor, and see the things aired himself. Harris having retired cat-like, Vizard explained—"My womankind shall not kill Uxmoor. He is a good fellow, and his mania—we have all got a mania, my young friends—is a respectable one. He wants to improve the condition of the poor—against their will."

"His friend! that was so ill. I hope he has not lost him," said Zoe.

"He hasn't lost him in this letter, Miss Gush," said Vizard. "But you can ask him when he comes."

"Of course I shall ask him," said Zoe.

Half an hour before dinner there was a grating of wheels on the gravel. Severne looked out of his bedroom-window, and saw Uxmoor drive up. Dark-blue coach; silver harness, glittering in the sun; four chestnuts, glossy as velvet; two neat grooms, as quick as lightning. He was down in a moment, and his traps in the hall, and the grooms drove the trap round to the stables.

They were all in the drawing-room when Lord Uxmoor appeared; greeted Zoe with respectful warmth, Vizard with easy friendship, Severne and Miss Dover with well-bred civility. He took Zoe out, and sat at her right hand at dinner.

As the new guest, he had the first claim on her attention, and they had a topic ready—his sick friend. He told her all about him, and his happy recovery, with simple warmth.

Zoe was interested and sympathetic; Fanny listened, and gave Severne short answers; Severne felt dethroned.

He was rather mortified, and a little uneasy, but too brave to show it. He bided his time. In the drawing-room Lord Uxmoor singled out Zoe, and courted her openly with respectful admiration. Severne drew Fanny apart, and exerted himself to amuse her. Zoe began to cast uneasy glances. Severne made common cause with Fanny. "We have no chance against a lord, or a lady, you and I, Miss Dover."

"I haven't," said she; "but you need not complain. She wishes she was here."

"So do I. Will you help me?"

"No, I shall not. You can make love to me. I am tired of never being made love to."

"Well," said this ingenuous youth, "you certainly do not get your deserts in this house. Even I am so blinded by my passion for Zoe, that I forget she does not monopolise all the beauty and grace and wit in the house."

"Go on," said Fanny. "I can bear a good deal of it—after such a fast."

"I have no doubt you can bear a good deal. You are one of those who inspire feelings, but don't share them. Give me a chance; let me sing you a song."

"A love-song?"

"Of course."

"Can you sing it as well as you can talk it?"

"With a little encouragement. If you would kindly stand at the end of the piano, and let me see your beautiful eyes fixed on me."

"With disdain?"

"No, no."

"With just suspicion?"

"No; with unmerited pity." And he began to open the piano.

"What! do you accompany yourself?"

"Yes, after a fashion; by that means I don't get run over."

Then this accomplished person fixed his eyes on Fanny Dover, and sang her an Italian love-song in the artificial, passionate style of that nation; and the English girl received it point-blank with complacent composure. But Zoe started and thrilled at the first note, and crept up to the piano as if drawn by an irresistible cord. She gazed on the singer with

amazement and admiration. His voice was a low tenor, round, and sweet as honey. It was a real voice, a musical instrument.

> "More tuneable than lark to shepherd's ear
> When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear."

And the Klosking had cured him of the fatal whine which stains the amateur, male or female, and had taught him climax, so that he articulated, and sang with perfect purity, and rang out his final notes instead of slurring them. In short, in plain passages he was a reflection, on a small scale, of that great singer. He knew this himself, and had kept clear of song; it was so full of reminiscence and stings. But now jealousy drove him to it.

It was Vizard's rule to leave the room whenever Zoe or Fanny opened the piano. So in the evening that instrument of torture was always mute.

But hearing a male voice, the squire, who doted on good music, as he abhorred bad, strolled in upon the chance; and he stared at the singer.

When the song ended, there was a little clamour of ladies' voices calling him to account for concealing his talent from them.

"I was afraid of Vizard," said he; "he hates bad music."

"None of your tricks," said the squire; "yours is not bad music; you speak your words articulately, and even eloquently. Your accompaniment is a little queer, especially in the bass; but you find out your mistakes, and slip out of them heaven knows how. Zoe, you are tame, but accurate: correct his accompaniments some day—when I'm out of hearing. Practice drives me mad. Give us another."

Severne laughed good-humouredly. "Thus encouraged, who could resist?" said he. "It is so delightful to sing in a shower-bath of criticism."

He sang a sprightly French song, with prodigious spirit and dash.

They all applauded, and Vizard said, "I see how it is. We were not good enough. He would not come out for us. He wanted the public. Uxmoor, you are the public. It is to you we owe this pretty warbler. Have you any favourite song, Public? Say the word, and he shall sing it you."

Severne turned rather red at that, and was about to rise slowly, when Uxmoor, who was instinctively a gentleman, though not a courtier, said: "I don't presume to choose Mr. Severne's songs; but if we are not tiring him, I own I should like to hear an English song; for I am no musician, and the words are everything with me."

Severne assented drily, and made him a shrewd return for his courtesy.

Zoe had a brave rose in her black hair. He gave her one rapid glance of significance, and sang a Scotch song, almost as finely as it could be sung in a room:—

> "My love is like the red, red rose,
> That's newly sprung in June;
> My love is like a melody
> That's sweetly played in tune."

The dog did not slur the short notes and howl upon the long ones, as did a little fat Jew from London, with a sweet voice and no brains, whom I last heard howl it in the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh. No; he retained the pure rhythm of the composition, and, above all, sang it with the gentle earnestness and unquavering emotion of a Briton.

It struck Zoe's heart point-blank. She drew back, blushing like the rose in her hair and in the song, and hiding her happiness from all but the keen Fanny. Everybody but Zoe applauded the song. She spoke only with her cheeks and eyes.

Severne rose from the piano. He was asked to sing another, but declined laughingly. Indeed, soon afterwards he glided out of the room and was seen no more that night.

Consequently he became the topic of conversation; and the three who thought they knew him, vied in his praises.

In the morning an expedition was planned, and Lord Uxmoor proffered his "four-in-hand." It was accepted. All young ladies like to sit behind four spanking trotters; and few object to be driven by a Viscount with a glorious beard and large estates.

Zoe sat by Uxmoor. Severne sat behind them with Fanny, a spectator of his open admiration. He could not defend himself so well as last night, and he felt humiliated by the position.

It was renewed day after day. Zoe often cast a glance back, and drew him into the conversation; yet, on the whole, Uxmoor thrust him aside by his advantages and his resolute wooing.

The same thing at dinner. It was only at night he could be number one. He tuned Zoe's guitar; and one night, when there was a party, he walked about the room with this, and putting his left leg out, serenaded one lady after another. Barfordshire was amazed and delighted at him, but Uxmoor courted Zoe as if he did not exist. He began to feel that he was the man to amuse women in Barfordshire, but Uxmoor the man to marry them. He began to sulk. Zoe's quick eye saw and pitied. She was puzzled what to do. Lord Uxmoor gave her no excuse for throwing cold water on him, because his adoration was implied not expressed; and he followed her up so closely, she could hardly get a word with Severne. When she did, there was consolation in every tone; and she took care to let drop that Lord Uxmoor was going in a day or two. So he was, but he altered his mind and asked leave to stay.

Severne looked gloomy at this, and he became dejected. He was miserable, and showed it, to see what Zoe would do. What she did was to get rather bored by Uxmoor, and glance from Fanny to Severne. I believe Zoe only meant, "Do, pray, say things to comfort him;" but Fanny read these gentle glances *à la* Dover. She took Severne aside one day and said —

"What is the matter with you?"

"Of course you can't divine," said he sarcastically.

"Oh yes, I can; and it is your own fault."

"My fault! that is a good joke. Did I invite this man with all his advantages? That was Vizard's doing, who calls himself my friend."

"If it was not this one, it would be some other. Can you hope to keep Zoe Vizard from being courted? Why, she is the beauty of the county! and her brother not married. It is no use you making love by halves to her. She will go to some man who is in earnest."

"And am I not in earnest?"

"Not so much as he is. You have known her four months, and never once asked her to marry you."

"So I am to be punished for my self-denial."

"Self-denial! nonsense. Men have no self-denial. It is your cowardice."

"Don't be cruel. You know it is my poverty."

"Your poverty of spirit. You gave up money for her, and that is as good as if you had it still, and better. If you love Zoe, scrape up an income somehow, and say the word. Why, Harrington is bewitched with you, and he is rolling in money. I wouldn't lose her by cowardice if I was you. Uxmoor will offer marriage before he goes. He is staying on for that. Now, take my word for it, when one man offers marriage and the other does not, there is always a good chance of the girl saying this one is in earnest, and the other is not. We don't expect self-denial in a man; we don't believe in it. We see you seizing upon everything else you care for; and if you don't seize on us, it wounds our vanity, the strongest passion we have. Consider, Uxmoor has title, wealth, everything to bestow with the wedding-ring. If he offers all that, and you don't offer all you have, how much more generous he looks to her than you do!"

"In short, you think she will doubt my affection, if I don't ask her to share my poverty."

"If you don't, and a rich man asks her to share his all, I'm sure she will. And so should I. Words are only words."

"You torture me; I'd rather die than lose her."

"Then live and win her. I've told you the way."

"I will scrape an income together, and ask her."

"Upon your honour?"

"Upon my soul."

"Then, in my opinion, you will have her in spite of Lord Uxmoor."

Hot from this, Edward Severne sat down and wrote a moving letter to a certain cousin of his in Huntingdonshire.

"My dear Cousin,—I have often heard you say you were under obligations to my father, and had a regard for me. Indeed, you have shown the latter by letting the interest on my mortgage run out many years and not foreclosing. Having no other friend, I now write to you, and throw myself on your pity. I have formed a deep attachment to a young lady of infinite beauty and virtue. She is above me in everything, especially in fortune. Yet she deigns to love me. I can't ask her hand as a pauper; and by my own folly, now deeply repented, I am little more. Now, all depends on

you, my happiness, my respectability. Sooner or later I shall be able to repay you all. For God's sake come to the assistance of your affectionate cousin,

"EDWARD SEVERNE.

"The brother, a man of immense estates, is an old friend, and warmly attached to me. If I could only, through your temporary assistance or connivance, present my estate as clear, all would be well, and I could repay you afterwards."

To this letter he received an immediate reply.

"DEAR EDWARD,—I thought you had forgotten my very existence. Yes, I owe much to your father, and have always said so, and acted accordingly. Whilst you have been wandering abroad, deserting us all, I have improved your estate. I have bought all the other mortgages, and of late the rent has paid the interest, within a few pounds. I now make you an offer. Give me a long lease of the two farms at £300 a year—they will soon be vacant—and £2000 out of hand, and I will cancel all the mortgages, and give you a receipt for them as paid in full. This will be like paying you several thousand pounds for a beneficial lease. The £2000 I must insist on, in justice to my own family.—Your affectionate cousin, GEORGE SEVERNE."

This munificent offer surprised and delighted Severne; and indeed, no other man but cousin George, who had a heart of gold, and was grateful to Ned's father, and also loved the scamp himself, as everybody did, would have made such an offer.

Our adventurer wrote and closed with it, and gushed gratitude. Then he asked himself how to get the money. Had he been married to Zoe, or not thinking of her, he would have gone at once to Vizard, for the security was ample. But in his present delicate situation this would not do. No: he must be able to come and say, "My estate is small, but it is clear. Here is a receipt for £6000 worth of mortgages I have paid off. I am poor in land, but rich in experience, regrets, and love. Be my friend, and trust me with Zoe."

He turned and twisted it in his mind, and resolved on a bold course. He would go to Homburg, and get that sum by hook or by crook out of Ina Klosking's winnings. He

took Fanny into his confidence; only he substituted London for Homburg.

"And oh, Miss Dover," said he, "do not let me suffer by going away and leaving a rival behind."

"Suffer by it!" said she. "No. I mean to reward you for taking my advice. Don't you say a word to *her*. It will come better from me. I'll let her know what you are gone for: and she is just the girl to be upon honour, and ever so much cooler to Lord Uxmoor, because you are unhappy, but have gone away trusting her."

And his artful ally kept her word. She went into Zoe's room before dinner to have it out with her.

In the evening Severne told Vizard he must go up to London for a day or two.

"All right," said Vizard. "Tell some of them to order the dog-cart for your train."

But Zoe took occasion to ask him for how long, and murmured, "Remember how we shall miss you," with such a look, that he was in Elysium that evening.

But at night he packed his bag for Homburg, and that chilled him. He lay slumbering all night, but not sleeping, and waking with starts and a sense of horror.

At breakfast, after reading his letters, Vizard asked him what train he would go by.

He said, the one o'clock.

"All right," said Vizard. Then he rang the bell, countermanded the dog-cart, and ordered the barouche.

"A barouche for me!" said Severne. "Why, I am not going to take the ladies to the station."

"No; it is to bring one here. She comes down from London five minutes before you take the up train."

There was a general exclamation—Who was it? Aunt Maitland?

"No," said Vizard, tossing a note to Zoe—"it is Doctress Gale."

Severne's countenance fell.

CHAPTER XIX

Edward Severne, master of arts, dreaded Rhoda Gale, M.D. He had deluded, in various degrees, several ladies that were no fools; but here was one who staggered and puzzled him. Bright and keen as steel, quick and spirited, yet controlled by judgment, and always mistress of herself, she seemed to him a new species. The worst of it was, he felt himself in the power of this new woman, and indeed he saw no limit to the mischief she might possibly do him if she and Zoe compared notes. He had thought the matter over, and realised this more than he did when in London. Hence the good youth's delight at her illness, noticed in a former chapter.

He was very thoughtful all breakfast-time, and as soon as it was over, drew Vizard apart, and said he would postpone his visit to London until he had communicated with his man of business. He would go to the station and telegraph him; and by that means would do the civil and meet Miss Gale. Vizard stared at him.

"You meet my virago? Why, I thought you disapproved her entirely."

"No, no; only the idea of a female doctor, not the lady herself. Besides, it is a rule with me, my dear fellow, never to let myself disapprove my friend's friends."

"That is a bright idea, and you are a good fellow," said Vizard. "Go and meet the pest by all means, and bring her here to luncheon. After luncheon we will drive her up to the farm and ensconce her."

Edward Severne had this advantage over most impostors, that he was masculine or feminine as occasion required. For instance, he could be hysterical, or bold, to serve the turn. Another example—he watched faces like a woman, and yet he could look you in the face like a man, especially when he was lying. In the present conjuncture a crafty woman would have bristled with all the arts of self-defence, but stayed at home and kept close to Zoe: not so our master of arts; he went manfully to meet Rhoda Gale, and so secure a *tête-à-tête*, and learn, if possible, what she meant to do, and whether she could be cannily propitiated. He

reached the station before her, and took that opportunity to wire a very intelligent person who, he knew, conducted delicate inquiries, and had been very successful in a divorce case, public two years before. Even as he despatched this message there was a whistling and a ringing, and the sound of a coming train, and Ned Severne ran to meet Rhoda Gale with a heart palpitating a little, and a face beaming greatly to order. He looked for her in the first-class carriages; but she was in the second, and saw him. He did not see her till she stepped out on the platform. Then he made towards her. He took off his hat, and said with respectful zeal, "If you will tell me what luggage you have, the groom shall get it out."

Miss Gale's eyes wandered over him loftily. "I have only a box and a bag, sir, both marked R. G."

"Joe," said he—for he had already made friends with all the servants, and won their hearts—"box and bag marked R. G. Miss Gale, you had better take your seat in the carriage."

Miss Gale gave a little supercilious nod, and he showed her obsequiously into the carriage. She laid her head back and contemplated vacancy ahead in a manner anything but encouraging to this new admirer Fate had sent her. He turned away a little discomfited, and when the luggage was brought up he had the bag placed inside, and the box in a sort of boot, and then jumped in and seated himself inside.

"Home," said he to the coachman, and off they went. When he came in she started with well-feigned surprise, and stared at him.

"Oh," said she, "I have met you before. Why, it is Mr. Severne. Excuse me for taking you for one of the servants. Some people have short memories, you know."

This deliberate affront was duly felt, but parried with a master-hand.

"Why, I *am* one of the servants," said he. "Only I am not Vizard's. I'm yours."

"In-deed!"

"If you will let me."

"I am too poor to have fine servants."

"Say too haughty: you are not too poor; for I shall not cost you anything but a gracious word now and then."

"Unfortunately I don't deal in gracious words, only true ones."

"I see that."

"Then suppose you imitate me, and tell me why you came to meet me?"

This question came from her with sudden celerity, like lightning out of a cloud, and she bent her eyes on him with that prodigious keenness she could throw into those steel-grey orbs, when her mind put on its full power of observation.

Severne coloured a little and hesitated.

"Come now," said this keen witch, "don't wait to make up a reason. Tell the truth for once—quick!—quick!—why did *you* come to meet *me?*"

"I didn't come to be bullied," replied supple Severne, affecting sullenness.

"You didn't!" cried the other, acting vast surprise. "Then what *did* you come for?"

"I don't know; and I wish I hadn't come."

"That I believe." Rhoda shot this in like an arrow.

"But," continued Severne, "if I hadn't nobody would; for it is Vizard's justicing day, and the ladies are too taken up with a lord to come and meet such vulgar trifles as genius, and learning, and sci——"

"Come, come!" said Rhoda contemptuously; "you care as little about science, and learning, and genius as I possess them. You won't tell me? Well, I shall find you out." Then, after a pause, "Who is this lord?"

"Lord Uxmoor."

"What kind of a lord is he?"

"A very bushy lord."

"Bushy—oh, bearded like the pard. Now tell me," said she, "is he cutting you out with Miss Vizard?"

"You shall judge for yourself. Please spare me on that one topic—if you ever spared anybody in your life."

"Oh, dear me!" said Rhoda coolly. "I'm not so very cruel; I'm only a little vindictive, and cat-like. If people offend me, I like to play with them a bit, and amuse myself, and then kill them—kill them—kill them: that is all."

This pretty little revelation of character was accompanied with a cruel smile that showed a long row of dazzling white teeth. They seemed capable of killing anything from a liar up to a hickory-nut.

Severne looked at her and gave a shudder. "Then Heaven forbid you should ever be my enemy!" said he sadly; "for I am unhappy enough already."

Having delivered this disarming speech he collapsed, and seemed to be overpowered with despondency. Miss Gale showed no signs of melting. She leaned back and eyed him with steady and composed curiosity, as a zoologist studying a new specimen and all its little movements.

They drove up to the hall-door, and Miss Gale was conducted to the drawing-room, where she found Lord Uxmoor and the two young ladies. Zoe shook hands with her. Fanny put a limp paw into hers, which made itself equally limp directly, so Fanny's dropped out. Lord Uxmoor was presented to her, at his own request. Soon after this, luncheon was announced. Vizard joined them, welcomed Rhoda genially, and told the party he had ordered the break, and Uxmoor would drive them to the farm round by Hillstoke and the Common. "And so," said he, "by showing Miss Gale our most picturesque spot at once, we may perhaps blind her to the horrors of her situation—for a time."

The break was driven round in due course, with Uxmoor's team harnessed to it. It was followed by a dog-cart crammed with grooms, Uxmoorian and Vizardian. The break was padded and cushioned, and held eight or nine people very comfortably. It was, indeed, a sort of picnic van, used only in very fine weather. It rolled on beautiful springs. Its present contents were Miss Gale and her luggage, and two hampers full of good things for her; Vizard, Severne, and Miss Dover. Zoe sat on the box beside Lord Uxmoor. They drove through the village, and Mr. Severne was so obliging as to point out its beauties to Miss Gale. She took little notice of his comments, except by a stiff nod every now and then, but eyed each house and premises with great keenness.

At last she stopped his fluency by inquiring whether he had been into them all; and when he said he had not, she took advantage of that admission to inform him that in two days' time she should be able to tell him a great deal more than he was likely to tell her, upon his method of inspecting villages.

"That is right," said Vizard, "snub him. He gets snubbed too little here. How dare he pepper science with his small-talk? But it is our fault—we admire his volubility."

"Oh," said Fanny, with a glance of defiance at Miss Gale, "if we are to talk nothing but science, it *will* be a weary world."

After the village there was a long gradual ascent of about a mile, and then they entered a new country. It was a

series of woods and clearings, some grass, some arable. Huge oaks flung their arms over a road lined on either side by short turf, close cropped by the gipsies' cattle. Some band or other of them was always encamped by the roadside, and never two bands at once. And between these giant trees, not one of which was ever felled, you saw here and there a glade, green as an emerald; or a yellow stubble, glowing in the sun. After about a mile of this, still mounting, but gradually, they emerged upon a spacious table-land, a long broad open grass plateau, studded with cottages. In this lake of grass Uxmoor drew up at a word from Zoe to show Miss Gale the scene. The cottages were white as snow, and thatched as at Islip; but instead of vegetable gardens they all had orchards. The trees were apple and cherry: of the latter not less than a thousand in that small hamlet. It was literally a lawn, a quarter of a mile long, and about two hundred yards broad, bordered with white cottages and orchards. The cherries, red and black, gleamed like countless eyes among the cool leaves. There was a little church on the lawn that looked like a pigeon-house. A cow or two grazed peacefully. Pigs, big and little, crossed the lawn grunting and squeaking satisfaction, and dived into the adjacent woods after acorns, and here and there a truffle the villagers knew not the value of. There was a pond or two in the lawn: one had a wooden plank fixed on uprights that went in some way. A woman was out on the board bare-armed, dipping her bucket in for water. In another pond an old knowing horse stood gravely cooling his heels up to the fetlocks. These, with shirts, male and female, drying on a line, and white-headed children rolling in the dust, and a donkey braying his heart out for reasons known only to himself, if known at all, were the principal details of the sylvan hamlet; but on a general survey there were grand beauties. The village and its turf lay in the semicircular sweep of an unbroken forest; but at the sides of the leafy basin glades had been cut for drawing timber, stacking bark, &c.; and what Milton calls so happily, "the chequered shade," was seen in all its beauty; for the hot sun struggled in at every aperture, and splashed the leaves and the path with fiery flashes and streaks, and topaz brooches, all intensified in fire and beauty by the cool adjacent shadows.

Looking back, the view was quite open in most places. The wooded lanes and strips they had passed were little

more in so vast a panorama than the black stripes on a backgammon-board. The site was so high that the eye swept over all, and rested on a broad valley beyond, with a patchwork pattern of variegated fields, and the curling steam of engines flying across all England; then swept by a vast incline up to an horizon of faint green hills, the famous pastures of the United Kingdom. So that it was a deep basin of foliage in front; but you had only to turn your body and there was a forty-mile view, with all the sweet varieties of colour that gem our fields and meadows, as they bask in the afternoon sun of that golden time, when summer melts into autumn, and mellows without a chill.

"Oh!" cried Miss Gale, "don't anybody speak, please. It is too beautiful."

They respected an enthusiasm so rare in this young lady, and let her contemplate the scene at her ease.

"I reckon," said she dogmatically, and nodding that wise little head, "that this is old England; the England my ancestors left in search of liberty—and that's a plant that ranks before cherry-trees, I rather think. No, I couldn't have gone; I'd have stayed and killed a hundred tyrants. But I wouldn't have chopped their heads off; (to Vizard, very confidentially), I'd have poisoned 'em."

"Don't, Miss Gale," said Fanny; "you make my blood run cold."

As it was indifferent to Miss Gale whether she made Miss Dover's blood run cold or not, she paid no attention, but proceeded with her reflections. "The only thing that spoils it is the smoke of those engines, reminding one that in two hours you or I, or that pastoral old hermit there in a smock-frock, and a pipe, and oh, what bad tobacco! can be wrenched out of this paradise, and shrieked and rattled off and flung into that wilderness of brick called London, where the hearts are as hard as the pavement—except those that have strayed there from Barfordshire."

The witch changed face, and tone, and everything like lightning, and threw this last in with a sudden grace and sweetness that contrasted strangely with her usual sharpness.

Zoe heard, and turned round to look down on her with a smile as sweet as honey. "I hardly think that is a drawback," said she amicably. "Does not being able to leave a place make it sweeter? for then we are free in it, you know. But I must own there *is* a drawback—the boys' faces, Miss Gale, they *are* so pasty."

"Indeed!" says Rhoda, pricking up her ears.

"Nurse no false hopes of an epidemic; this is not an infirmary in a wood, Miss Gale," said Vizard. "My sister is a great colourist, and pitches her expectations too high. I daresay their faces are not more pasty than usual; but this is a show place, and looks like a garden; so Zoe wants the boys to be poppies and pansies, and the girls roses and lilies. Which—they—are—not."

"All I know is," said Zoe resolutely, "that in Islip the children's faces are rosy; but here they are pasty—dreadfully pasty."

"Well, you have got a box of colours; we will come up some day, and tint all the putty-faced boys." It was to Miss Dover the company owed this suggestion.

"No," said Rhoda. "Their faces are my business, I'll soon fix them; she didn't say putty-faced, she said pasty."

"Grateful to you for the distinction, Miss Gale," said Zoe.

Miss Gale proceeded to insist that boys are not pasty-faced without a cause, and it is to be sought lower down. "Ah!" cried she suddenly, "is that a cherry that I see before me? No, a million. They steal them and eat them by the thousand, and that's why. Tell the truth now, everybody—they eat the stones."

Miss Vizard said she did not know, but thought them capable.

"Children know nothing," said Vizard. "Please address all future scientific inquiries to an 'old inhabitant.' Miss Gale, the country abounds in curiosities; but, amongst those curiosities, even science with her searching eye has never yet discovered an unswallowed cherry-stone in Hillstoke village."

"What! not on the trees?"

"She is too much for me. Drive on, coachman, and drown her replies in the clatter of hoofs. Round by the Stag, Zoe. I am uneasy till I have locked Fair Science up. I own it is a mean way of getting rid of a troublesome disputant."

"Now I think it is quite fair," said Fanny. "She shuts you up, and so you lock her up."

"'Tis well," said Vizard dolefully. "Now I am No. 3—I who used to retort and keep girls in their places—with difficulty. Here is Ned Severne, too, reduced to silence. Why, where's your tongue? Miss Gale, you would hardly believe it, this is our chatter-box. We have been days and

days, and could not get in a word edgeways for him. But now all he can do is to gaze on you with canine devotion, and devour the honey—I beg pardon, the lime-juice—of your lips. I warn you of one thing, though; there is such a thing as a threatening silence. He is evidently booking every word you utter; and he will deliver it all, for his own, behind your back some fine day."

With this sort of banter and small-talk not worth deluging the reader dead with, they passed away the time till they reached the farm.

"You stay here," said Vizard—"all but Zoe. Tom and George, get the things out." The grooms had already jumped out of the dog-cart, and two were at the horses' heads. The step-ladder was placed for Zoe, and Vizard asked her to go in and see the rooms were all right, while he took Miss Gale to the stables. He did so, and showed her a spirited Galloway and a steady old horse, and told her she could ride one and drive the other all over the country.

She thanked him, but said her attention would be occupied by the two villages first, and she should make him a report in forty-eight hours.

"As you please," said he; "you are terribly in earnest."

"What should I be worth, if I was not?"

"Well, come and see your shell; and you must tell me if we have forgotten anything essential to your comfort."

She followed him, and he led her to a wing of the farm-house, comparatively new, and quite superior to the rest. Here were two good sunny rooms, with windows looking south and west, and they were both papered with a white watered pattern, and a pretty French border of flowers at the upper part to look gay and cheerful.

Zoe was in the bedroom arranging things with a pretty air of hospitality. It was cheerily fitted up, and a fire of beech-logs blazing.

"How good you are!" said Rhoda, looking wistfully at her. But Zoe checked all comments by asking her to look at the sitting-room, and see if it would do. Rhoda would rather have stayed with Zoe; but she complied, and found another bright cheerful room, and Vizard standing in the middle of it. There was another beech-fire blazing, though it was hot weather. Here was a round table, with a large pot full of flowers, geraniums and musk flowers outside, with the sun gilding their green leaves most amiably, and every-

thing unpretending, but bright and comfortable; well-padded sofa, luxurious arm-chair, standing-up reading-desk, and a very large knee-hole table: a fine mirror from the ceiling to the dado; a book-case with choice books, and on a pembroke table near the wall were several periodicals. Rhoda, after a cursory survey of the room, flew to the books. "Oh," said she, "what good books! all standard works; and several on medicine; and I declare, the last numbers of the *Lancet* and the *Medical Gazette*, and the very best French and German periodicals! Oh, what have I done? and what can I ever do?"

"What! are *you* going to gush like the rest—and about nothing?" said Vizard. "Then I'm off; come along, Zoe," and he hurried his sister away.

She came at the word; but as soon as they were out of the house, asked him what was the matter.

"I thought she was going to gush. But I daresay it was a false alarm."

"And why shouldn't she gush, when you have been so kind?"

"Pooh! nonsense! I have not been kind to her, and don't mean to be kind to her or to any woman; besides, she must not be allowed to gush: she is the parish virago—imported from vast distances as such—and for her to play the woman would be an abominable breach of faith. We have got our gusher, likewise our flirt; and it was understood from the first that this was to be a new *dramatis persona*—was not to be a repetition of you or *la* Dover, but—ahem—the third grace, a virago: solidified vinegar."

Rhoda Gale felt very happy. She was young, healthy, ambitious, and sanguine. She divined that somehow her turning-point had come; and when she contrasted her condition a month ago, and the hardness of the world, with the comfort and kindness that now surrounded her, and the magnanimity which fled, not to be thanked for them, she felt for once in a way humble as well as grateful, and said to herself—"It is not to myself nor any merit of mine I owe such a change as all this is."

She went into the kitchen, ordered tea, bread and butter, and one egg, for dinner, at seven o'clock, and walked instantly back to Hillstoke to inspect the village according to her ideas of inspection.

Next morning down came the bailiff's head man in his

light cart, and a note was delivered to Vizard at the breakfast-table. He read it to himself, then proclaimed silence and read it aloud.

"Dear Sir,—As we crossed your hall to luncheon there was the door of a small room half open, and I saw a large mahogany case standing on a marble table with one leg, but three claws gilt. I saw 'Micro' printed on the case. So I hope it is a microscope, and a fine one. To enable you to find it if you don't know, the room had crimson curtains, and is papered in green flock. That is the worst of all the poisonous papers; because the texture is loose, and the poisonous stuff easily detached, and always flying about the room. I hope you do not sit in it, nor Miss Vizard, because sitting in that room is courting death. Please lend me the microscope, if it is one, and I'll soon show you why the boys are putty-faced. I have inspected them, and find Miss Dover's epithet more exact than Miss Vizard's, which is singular. I will take great care of it.—Yours respectfully,

"Rhoda Gale."

Vizard ordered a servant to deliver the microscope to Miss Gale's messenger with his compliments. Fanny wondered what she wanted with it. "Not to inspect our little characters, it is to be hoped," said Vizard. "Why not pay her a visit, you ladies? then she will tell you, perhaps." The ladies instantly wore that bland look of inert but rocky resistance I have already noted as a characteristic of "our girls." Vizard saw and said, "Try and persuade them, Uxmoor."

"I can only offer Miss Vizard my escort," said Lord Uxmoor.

"And I offer both ladies mine," said Ned Severne, rather loud, and with a little sneer, to mark his superior breeding. The gentleman was so extremely polite in general, that there was no mistaking his hostile intentions now. The inevitable war had begun, and the first shot was fired. Of course the wonder was it had not come long before; and perhaps I ought to have drawn more attention to the delicacy and tact of Zoe Vizard, which had averted it for a time. To be sure, she had been aided by the size of the house and its habits. The ladies had their own sitting-rooms; Fanny kept close to Zoe by special orders; and nobody could get a chance *tête-à-tête* with Zoe unless she chose. By this means,

by her native dignity and watchful tact, by her frank courtesy to Uxmoor, and by the many little quiet ways she took to show Severne her sentiments remained unchanged, she had managed to keep the peace, and avert that open competition for her favour, which would have tickled the vanity of a Fanny Dover, but shocked the refined modesty of a Zoe Vizard.

But nature will have her way, soon or late; and it is the nature of males to fight for the female.

At Severne's shot Uxmoor drew up a little haughtily, but did not feel sure anything was intended. He was little accustomed to rubs. Zoe, on the other hand, turned a little pale—just a little; for she was sorry, but not surprised; so she proved equal to the occasion: she smiled and made light of it. "Of course we are *all* going," said she.

"Except one," said Vizard drily.

"That is too bad," said Fanny. "Here he drives us all to visit his blue-stocking, but he takes good care not to go himself."

"Perhaps he prefers to visit her alone," suggested Severne. Zoe looked alarmed.

"That is *so*," said Vizard. "Observe, I am learning her very phrases. When you come back, tell me every word she says; pray let nothing be lost that falls from my virago."

The party started after luncheon; and Severne, true to his new policy, whipped to Zoe's side before Uxmoor, and engaged her at once in conversation.

Uxmoor bit his lip, and fell to Fanny. Fanny saw at once what was going on, and made herself very agreeable to Uxmoor. He was polite, and a little gratified, but cast uneasy glances at the other pair.

Meantime Severne was improving his opportunity. "Sorry to disturb Lord Uxmoor's monopoly," said he sarcastically; "but I could not bear it any longer."

"I do not object to the change," said Zoe, smiling maternally on him; "but you will be good enough to imitate me in one thing—you will always be polite to Lord Uxmoor."

"He makes it rather hard."

"It is only for a time; and we must all learn to be capable of self-denial. I assure you I have exercised quite as much as I ask of you. Edward, he is a gentleman of great worth, universally respected, and my brother has a particular wish

to be friends with him. So pray be patient; be considerate. Have a little faith in one who——"

She did not end the sentence.

"Well, I will," said he. "But please think of me a little. I am beginning to feel quite thrust aside, and degraded in my own eyes for putting up with it."

"For shame to talk so!" said Zoe; but the tears came into her eyes.

The master of arts saw, and said no more. He had the art of not over-doing: he left the arrow to rankle. He walked by her side in silence for ever so long. Then, suddenly, as if by a mighty effort of unselfish love, went off into delightful discourse. He cooed and wooed, and flattered, and fascinated; and by the time they reached the farm, had driven Uxmoor out of her head.

Miss Gale was out. The farmer's wife said she had gone into the town—meaning Hillstoke—which was, strictly speaking, a hamlet, or tributary village. Hillstoke Church was only twelve years old, and the tithes of the place went to the parson of Islip.

When Zoe turned to go, Uxmoor seized the opportunity, and drew up beside her, like a soldier falling into the ranks. Zoe felt hot; but as Severne took no open notice, she could not help smiling at the behaviour of the fellows; and Uxmoor got his chance.

Severne turned to Fanny, with a wicked sneer. "Very well, my lord," said he; "but I have put a spoke in your wheel."

"As if I did not see, you clever creature!" said Fanny admiringly.

"Ah, Miss Dover, I need to be as clever as you. See what I have against me: a rich lord, with the bushiest beard."

"Never you mind," said Fanny. "Good wine needs no bush—ha! ha! You are lovely and have a wheedling tongue, and you were there first. Be good, now—and you can flirt with me to fill up the time. I hate not being flirted at. It is stagnation."

"Yes, but it is not so easy to flirt with you, just a little. You are so charming." Thereupon he proceeded to flatter her, and wonder how he had escaped a passionate attachment to so brilliant a creature. "What saved me," said he oracularly, "is, that I never could love two at once; and Zoe seized my love at sight. She left me nothing to lay at your

feet but my admiration, the tenderest friendship man can feel for woman, and my life-long gratitude for fighting my battle. Oh, Miss Dover, I must be quite serious a moment. What other lady but you would be so generous as to befriend a poor man with another lady, when there's wealth and title on the other side."

Fanny blushed and softened, but turned it off. "There—no heroics, please," said she. "You are a dear little fellow; and don't go and be jealous, for he shan't have her. He would never ask me to his house, you know. Now I think you would, perhaps—who knows? Tell me, fascinating monster, are you going to be ungrateful?"

"Not to you. My home would always be yours; and you know it." And he caught her hand, and kissed it in an ungovernable transport, the strings of which he pulled himself. He took care to be quick about it though, and not let Zoe or Uxmoor see, who were walking on before, and behaving sedately.

In Hillstoke lived, on a pension from Vizard, old Mrs. Greenaway, rheumatic about the lower joints, so she went on crutches; but she went fast, being vigorous, and so did her tongue. At Hillstoke she was Dame Greenaway, being a relic of that generation which applied the word dame to every wife, high and low; but at Islip she was "Sally," because she had started under that title, fifty-five years ago, as housemaid at Vizard Court; and by the tenacity of oral tradition, retained it ever since, in spite of two husbands she had wedded and buried with equal composure.

Her feet were still springy, her arms strong as iron, and her crutches active. At the sight of our party she came out with amazing wooden strides, agog for gossip, and met them at the gate. She managed to indicate a curtsey, and said, "Good day, miss; your sarvant, all the company. Lord, how nice you be dressed, all on ye! to—be—sure. Well, miss, have ye heerd the news?"

"No, Sally. What is it?"

"What! haant ye heerd about the young 'oman at the farm?"

"Oh yes; we came to see her."

"No, did ye now? Well, she was here not half an hour agone. By the same toaken, I did put her a question, and she answered me then and there."

"And may I ask what the question was?"

"And welcome, miss. I said, says I, 'Young 'oman, where

be you come from?' so says she, 'Old 'oman, I be come from forin parts.' 'I thought as much,' says I. 'And what be'e come *for?*' 'To sojourn here,' says she, which she meant to bide a time. 'And what de'e count to do whilst here you be?' says I. Says she, 'As much good as ever I can do, and as little harm.' 'That is no answer,' says I. She said it would do for the present; 'and good day to you, ma'am,' says she. 'Your sarvant, miss,' says I; and she was off like a flash. But I called my grandson Bill, and I told him he must follow her, go where she would, and let us know what she was up to down in Islip. Then I went round the neighbours, and one told me one tale, and another another. But it all comes to one—we have gotten a BUSYBODY; that's the name I gives her. She don't give into that, ye know; she is a Latiner, and speaks according. She gave Master Giles her own description. Says she, 'I'm suspector-general of this here districk.' So then Giles he was skeared a bit—he have got an acre of land of his own, you know—and he up and asked her did she come under the taxes, or was she a fresh imposition; 'for we are burdened enough a'ready, no offence to you, miss,' says Josh Giles. 'Don't you be skeared, old man,' says she, 'I shan't cost *you* none; your better pays for I.' So says Giles, 'Oh, if you falls on Squire I don't vally that; Squire's back is broad enough to bear the load, but I'm a poor man.' That's how a' goes on, ye know. Poverty is always in his mouth; but the old chap have got a hatful of money hid away in the thatch or some're, only he haant a got the heart to spend it."

"Tell us more about the young lady," asked Uxmoor.

"What young lady? Oh, *her!* She is not a young lady—leastways she is not dressed like one, but like a plain, decent body. She was all of a piece—blue serge! Bless your heart! the pedlars bring it round here at elevenpence halfpenny the yard, and a good breadth too; and plain boots, not heeled like your'n, miss, nor your'n, ma'am; and a felt hat like a boy. You'd say the parish had dressed her for ten shillings, and got a pot of beer out on't."

"Well, never mind that," said Zoe; "I must tell you she is a very worthy young lady, and my brother has a respect for her. Dress? Why, Sally, you know it is not the wisest that spend most on dress. You might tell us what she *does*."

Dame Greenaway snatched the word out of her mouth. "Well, then, miss, what she have done, she have suspected

everything. She have suspected the ponds; she have suspected the houses; she have suspected the folk; she must know what they eat and drink and wear next their very skin, and what they do lie down on. She have been at the very boys and forbade 'em to swallow the cherry-stones, poor things; but old Mrs. Nash—which her boys lives on cherries at this time o' year, and to be sure they are a godsend to keep the children hereabout from starving — well, Dame Nash told her the Almighty knew best; He had put 'em together on the tree, so why not in the boys' insides; and that was common-sense to my mind. But la! she wouldn't hear it. She said, 'Then you'd eat the peach-stones by that rule, and the fish-bones and all.' Says she, quite resolute-like, 'I forbid 'em to swallow the stones;' and says she, 'Ye mawnt gainsay me, none on ye, for I be the new doctor.' So then it all came out. She isn't suspector-general; she is a wench turned doctor, which it is against reason. Shan't doctor *me*, for one; but that there old Giles, he says he is agreeable, if so be she wool doctor him cheap—cussed old fool!—as if any doctoring was cheap that kills a body and doan't cure 'em. Dear heart, I forgot to tell ye about the ponds. Well, you know there be no wells here. We makes our tea out of the ponds, and capital good tea to drink, far before well-water, for I mind that one day about twenty years agone, some interfering body did cart a barrel up from Islip, and 'twas main tasteless; and if we wants water withouten tea, why we can get plenty on't, and none too much malt and hops, at 'The Black Horse.' So this here young 'oman she suspects the poor ponds, and casts a hevil eye on them, and she borrows two mugs of Giles, and carries the water home to suspect it closer. That is all she have done at present, but you see she haant been here so very long. You mark my words, miss; that young 'oman will turn Hillstoke village topsy-turvy or ever she goes back to London town."

"Nonsense, Sally," said Zoe; "how can anybody do that whilst my brother and I are alive?" She then slipped half-a-crown into Sally's hand, and led the way to Islip.

On the road her conversation with Uxmoor took a turn suggestive of this interview. I forget which began it; but they differed a little in opinion, Uxmoor admiring Miss Gale's zeal and activity, and Zoe fearing that she would prove a rash reformer, perhaps a reckless innovator.

"And really," said she, "why disturb things? for, go where I will, I see no such paradise as these two villages."

"They are indeed lovely," said Uxmoor; "but my own village is very pretty. Yet on nearer inspection I have found so many defects, especially in the internal arrangements of the cottages, that I am always glad to hear of a new eye having come to bear on any village."

"I know you are very good," said Zoe, "and wish all the poor people about you to be as healthy and as happy as possible."

"I really do," said Uxmoor warmly. "I often think of the strange inequality in the lot of men. Living in the country, I see around me hundreds of men who are by nature as worthy as I am, or thereabouts. Yet they must toil and labour, and indeed fight for bare food and clothing all their lives, and worse off at the close of their long labour. That is what grieves me to the heart. All this time I revel in plenty and luxuries—not forgetting the luxury of luxuries, the delight of giving to those who need and deserve. What have I done for all this? I have been born of the right parents. My merit, then, is the accident of an accident. But having done nothing meritorious before I was born, surely I ought to begin afterwards. I think a man born to wealth ought to doubt his moral title to it, and ought to set to work to prove it—ought to set himself to repair the injustice of fortune by which he profits. Yes, such a man should be a sort of human sunshine and diffuse blessings all round him. The poor man that encounters him ought to bless the accident. But there, I am not eloquent. You know how much more I mean than I can say."

"Indeed I do," said Zoe, "and I honour you."

"Ah, Miss Vizard," said Uxmoor, "that is more than I can ever deserve."

"You are praising me at your own expense," said Zoe. "Well, then," said she sweetly, "please accept my sympathy. It is so rare to find a gentleman of your age thinking so little of himself and so much of poor people. Yet that is a divine command. But somehow we forget our religion, out of church—most of us. I am sure I do, for one."

This conversation brought them to the village, and there they met Vizard, and Zoe repeated old Sally's discourse to him word for word. He shook his head solemnly, and said he shared her misgivings. "We have caught a tartar."

On arriving at Vizard Court, they found Miss Gale had called and left two cards.

Open rivalry having now commenced between Uxmoor

and Severne, his lordship was adroit enough to contrive that the drag should be in request next day.

Then Severne got Fanny to convey a note to Zoe, imploring her to open her bedroom window and say good-night to him the last. "For," said he, "I have no coach-and-four, and I am very unhappy."

This and his staying sullenly at home spoiled Zoe's ride, and she was cool to Uxmoor, and spoilt his drive.

At night Zoe peeped through the curtain and saw Severne standing in the moonlight. Her eye drank him in for some time in silence, then she softly opened her window and looked out. He took a step nearer.

She said very softly and tenderly, "You are very naughty and very foolish. Go to bed *di*rectly." And she closed her window with a valiant slam; then sat down and sighed.

Same game next day. Uxmoor driving, Zoe wonderfully polite, but chill; because he was separating her and Severne. At night, Severne on the wet grass, and Zoe remonstrating severely, but not sincerely, and closing the window peremptorily she would have liked to keep open half the night.

It has often been remarked that great things arise out of small things; and sometimes, when in full motion, depend on small things. History offers brilliant examples upon its large stage. Fiction has imitated history in *un verre d'eau* and other compositions. To these examples, real or feigned, I am now about to add one; and the curious reader may, if he thinks it worth while, note the various ramifications, at home and abroad, of a seemingly trivial incident.

They were all seated at luncheon when a servant came in with a salver and said, "A gentleman to see you, sir." He presented his salver with a card upon it. Severne clutched the card, and jumped up reddening.

"Show him in here," said the hospitable Vizard.

"No, no," cried Severne, rather nervously; "it is my lawyer on a little private business."

Vizard told the servant to show the visitor into the library, and take in the madeira and some biscuits.

"It is about a lease," said Ned Severne, and went out rather hurriedly.

"La!" said Fanny, "what a curious name!—Poikilus. And what does S. I. mean, I wonder?"

"This is enigmatical discourse," said Vizard drily. "Please explain."

"Why, the card had Poikilus on it."

"You are very inquisitive," said Zoe, colouring.

"No more than my neighbours. But the man put his salver right between our noses, and how could I help seeing Poikilus in large letters, and S. I. in little ones up in the corner?"

Said Vizard, "The female eye is naturally swift. She couldn't help seeing all that in *half a moment of time;* for Ned Severne snatched up the card with vast expedition."

"I saw that too," said Fanny defiantly.

Uxmoor put in his word. "Poikilus! That is a name one sees in the papers."

"Of course you do. He is one of the humbugs of the day. Pretends to find things out; advertises mysterious disappearances; offers a magnificent reward—with perfect safety, because he has invented the lost girl's features, and dress, and her disappearance into the bargain;—and I hold with the schoolmen, that she who does not exist cannot disappear. Poikilus, a puffing detective. S. I., Secret Inquiry. *I* spell Enquiry with an E,—but Poikilus is a man of the day. What the deuce can Ned Severne want of him? I suppose I ought not to object. I have established a female detective at Hillstoke. So Ned sets up one at Islip. I shall make my own secret arrangements. If Poikilus settles here, he will be drawn through the horse-pond by small-minded rustics once a week."

Whilst he was going on like this, Zoe felt uncomfortable, and almost irritated by his volubility, and it was a relief to her when Severne returned. He had confided a most delicate case to the detective, given him written instructions, and stipulated for his leaving the house without a word to any one, and, indeed, seen him off—all in seven minutes. Yet he returned to our party cool as a cucumber, to throw dust in everybody's eyes.

"I must apologise for this intrusion," he said to Vizard; "but my lawyer wanted to consult me about the lease of one of my farms, and finding himself in the neighbourhood, he called instead of writing."

"Your lawyer, eh?" said Vizard slily. "What is your lawyer's name?"

"Jackson," said Ned, without a moment's hesitation.

Fanny giggled in her own despite.

Instead of stopping here, Severne must go on; it was his unlucky day.

"Not quite a gentleman, you know, or I would have inflicted his society on you."

"Not quite—eh?" said Harrington, so drily that Fanny Dover burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

But Zoe turned hot and cold to see him blundering thus, and telling lie upon lie.

Severne saw there was something wrong, and buried his nose in pigeon-pie. He devoured it with an excellent appetite, while every eye rested on him: Zoe's, with shame and misery; Uxmoor's, with open contempt; Vizard's, with good-humoured satire.

The situation became intolerable to Zoe Vizard. Indignant and deeply shocked herself, she still could not bear to see him the butt of others' ridicule and contempt. She rose haughtily and marched to the door. He raised his head for a moment as she went out. She turned and their eyes met. She gave him such a glance of pity and disdain as suspended the meat upon his fork, and froze him into comprehending that something very serious indeed had happened.

He resolved to learn from Fanny what it was and act accordingly. But Zoe's maid came in and whispered Fanny. She went out, and neither of the young ladies was seen till dinner-time. It was conveyed to Uxmoor that there would be no excursion of any kind this afternoon, and therefore he took his hat and went off to pay a visit. He called on Rhoda Gale. She was at home. He intended merely to offer her his respects, and to side with her generally against these foolish rustics; but she was pleased with him for coming, and made herself so agreeable that he spent the whole afternoon comparing notes with her upon village life, and the amelioration it was capable of. Each could give the other valuable ideas; and he said he hoped she would visit his part of the country ere long. She would find many defects, but also a great desire to amend them.

This flattered her, naturally; and she began to take an interest in him. That interest soon took the form of curiosity. She must know whether he was seriously courting Zoe Vizard or not. The natural reserve of a well-bred man withstood this at first; but that armour could not resist for two mortal hours such a daughter of Eve as this, with her insidious questions, her artful statements, her cat-like retreats and cat-like returns. She learned—though he did not see how far he

had committed himself—that he admired Zoe Vizard, and would marry her to-morrow if she would have him: his hesitation to ask her, because he had a rival, whose power he could not exactly measure; but a formidable and permitted rival.

They parted almost friends; and Rhoda settled quietly in her mind he should have Zoe Vizard, since he was so fond of her.

Here again it was Severne's unlucky day, and Uxmoor's lucky. To carry this same day to a close, Severne tried more than once to get near Zoe and ask if he had offended her, and in what. But no opportunity occurred. So then he sat and gazed at her, and looked unhappy. She saw, and was not unmoved, but would not do more than glance at him. He resigned himself to wait till night.

Night came. He went on the grass. There was a light in Zoe's room. It was eleven o'clock. He waited, shivering, till twelve. Then the light was put out; but no window opened. There was a moon; and her windows glared black on him, dark and bright as the eye she now averted from him. He was in disgrace.

The present incident I have recorded did not end here; and I must now follow Poikilus on his mission to Homburg; and, if the reader has a sense of justice, methinks he will not complain of the journey, for see how long I have neglected the noblest figure in this story, and the most to be pitied. To desert her longer would be too unjust, and derange entirely the balance of this complicated story.

CHAPTER XX

A CRUEL mental stroke, like a heavy blow upon the body, sometimes benumbs and sickens at first, but does not torture; yet that is to follow.

It was so with Ina Klosking. The day she just missed Edward Severne, and he seemed to melt away from her very grasp into the wide world again, she could drag herself to the theatre and sing angelically, with a dull and aching heart. But next day her heart entered on sharper suffering: she was irritated, exasperated; chained to the theatre, to Homburg, yet wild to follow Severne to England without delay. She told Ashmead she must and would go. He

opposed it stoutly, and gave good reasons. She could not break faith with the management. England was a large place. They had, as yet, no clue but a name. By waiting, the clue would come. The sure course was to give publicity in England to her winnings, and so draw Severne to her.

But, for once, she was too excited to listen to reason. She was tempest-tossed. "I *will* go—I *will* go," she repeated, as she walked the room wildly, and flung her arms aloft with reckless *abandon*, and yet, with a terrible majesty, an instinctive grace, and all the poetry of a great soul wronged, and driven wild.

She overpowered Ashmead, and drove him to the Director: he went most unwillingly; but, once there, was true to her, and begged off the engagement eagerly. The Director refused this plump. Then Ashmead, still true to his commission, offered him (most reluctantly) a considerable sum down to annul the contract, and backed this with a quiet hint that she would certainly fall ill, if refused. The Director knew by experience what this meant, and how easily these ladies can command the human body to death's door, *pro re nâta*, and how readily a doctor's certificate can be had to say or swear that the great creature cannot sing or act, without peril to life; though really both these arts are grand medicines, and far less likely to injure the *bonâ fide* sick, than are the certifying doctor's draughts and drugs. The Director knew all this; but he was furious at the disappointment threatening him. "No," said he; "this is always the way; a poor devil of a manager is never to have a success. It is treacherous, it is ungrateful; I'll close. You tell her, if she is determined to cut all our throats, and kick her own good fortune down, she can; but, by ——, I'll make her smart for it. Mind, now; she closes the theatre, and pays the expenses, if she plays me false."

"But if she is ill?"

"Let her die and be ——, and then I'll believe her. She is the healthiest woman in Germany. I'll go and take steps to have her arrested, if she offers to leave the town."

Ashmead reported the manager's threats, and the Klosking received them as a lioness the barking of a cur. She drew herself swiftly up, and her great eye gleamed imperial disdain at all his menaces but one.

"He will not really close the theatre," said she loftily, but uneasiness lurked in her manner.

"He will," said Ashmead. "He is desperate: and you

know it *is* hard, to go on losing and losing, and then, the moment luck turns, be done out of it, in spite of a written bargain. I've been a manager myself."

"So many poor people!" said Ina, with a sigh; and her defiant head sank a little.

"Oh, bother *them!*" said Ashmead craftily. "Let 'em starve."

"God forbid!" said Ina. Then she sighed again, and her queenly head sank lower. Then she faltered out, "I have the will to break faith and ruin poor people, but I have not the courage."

Then a tear or two began to trickle, carrying with them all the egotistical resolution Ina Klosking possessed at that time. Perhaps we shall see her harden; nothing stands still.

This time the poor conquered.

But every now and then, for many days, there were returns of torment and agitation, and wild desire to escape to England.

Ashmead made head against these with his simple arts. For one thing he showed her a dozen paragraphs in MS. he was sending to as many English weekly papers, describing her heavy gains at the table. "With these stones," said he, "I kill two birds: extend your fame, and entice your idol back to you." Here a growl, which I suspect was an inarticulate curse. Joseph, fie!

The pen of Joseph on such occasions was like his predecessor's coat, polychromatic. The Klosking read him, and wondered. "Alas!" said she, "with what versatile skill do you descant on a single circumstance, not very creditable!"

"Creditable!" said Ashmead; "it was very naughty; but it is very nice." And the creature actually winked, forgetting, of course, whom he was winking at, and wasting his vulgarity on the desert air; for the Klosking's eye might just manage to blink—at the meridian sun or so forth; but it never winked once in all its life. One of the paragraphs ran thus, with a heading in small capitals:—

"A Prima Donna at the Gambling-Table.

"Mademoiselle Klosking, the great contralto, whose success has been already recorded in all the journals, strolled on one of her off-nights into the Kursaal at Homburg, and sat down to *trente et quarante.* Her melodious voice was soon heard

betting heavily, with the most engaging sweetness of manner; and doubling seven times upon the red, she broke the bank, and retired with a charming curtsey, and eight thousand pounds in gold and notes."

Another dealt with the matter thus :—

"ROUGE ET NOIR.

"The latest *coup* at Homburg has been made by a cantatrice, whose praises all Germany are now ringing. Mademoiselle Klosking, successor and rival of Alboni, went to the Kursaal, *pour passer le temps;* and she passed it so well, that in half an hour the bank was broken, and there was a pile of notes and gold before La Klosking, amounting to ten thousand pounds and more. The lady waved these over to her agent, Mr. Joseph Ashmead, with a hand which, *par parenthèse,* is believed to be the whitest in Europe, and retired gracefully."

On perusing this, La Klosking held *two* white hands up to heaven in amazement at the skill and good taste which had dragged this feature into the incident.

"A DRAMATIC SITUATION.

"A circumstance has lately occurred here which will infallibly be seized on by the novelists in search of an incident. Mademoiselle Klosking, the new contralto, whose triumphant progress through Europe will probably be the next event in music, walked into the Kursaal the other night, broke the bank, and walked out again with twelve thousand pounds, and that charming composure which is said to distinguish her in private life.

"What makes it more remarkable is that the lady is not a gamester, has never played before, and is said to have declared that she shall never play again. It is certain that, with such a face, figure, and voice as hers, she need never seek for wealth at the gaming-table. Mademoiselle Klosking is now in negotiation with all the principal cities of the Continent. But the English managers, we apprehend, will prove awkward competitors."

Were I to reproduce the nine other paragraphs, it would be a very curious, instructive, and tedious specimen of litera-

ture: and who knows, I might corrupt some immaculate soul, inspire some actor or actress, singer or songstress, with an itch for public self-laudation, a foible from which they are all at present so free. Witness the *Era*, the *Hornet*, and *Figaro*.

Ina Klosking spotted what she conceived to be a defect in these histories. "My friend," said she meekly, "the sum I won was under five thousand pounds."

"Was it? Yes, to be sure. But you see these are English advertisements. Now England is so rich, that, if you keep down to any *Continental* sum, you give a false impression in England of the importance on the spot."

"And so we are to falsify figures? In the first of these legends it was double the truth: and as I read, it enlarges—oh, but it enlarges," said Ina, with a gallicism we shall have to forgive in a lady who spoke five languages.

"Madam," said Ashmead drily, "you must expect your capital to increase rapidly, so long as I conduct it."

Not being herself swift to shed jokes, Ina did not take them rapidly. She stared at him. He never moved a muscle. She gave a slight shrug of her grand shoulders, and resigned that attempt to reason with the creature.

She had a pill in store for him, though. She told him that as she had sacrificed the longings of her heart to the poor of the theatre, so she should sacrifice a portion of her ill-gotten gains to the poor of the town.

He made a hideously wry face at that; asked what poor-rates were for? and assured her that "pauper" meant "drunkard."

"It is not written so in Scripture," said Ina: "and I need their prayers; for I am very unhappy."

In short, Ashmead was driven out from the presence-chamber, with a thousand thalers to distribute amongst the poor of Homburg; and, once in the street, his face did not shine like an angel's of mercy, but was very pinched and morose; hardly recognisable—poor Joe!

By-and-by he scratched his head. Now it is unaccountable; but certain heads often yield an idea in return for that. Joseph's did, and his countenance brightened.

Three days after this, Ina was surprised by a note from the Burgomaster, saying that he and certain of the town-council would have the honour of calling on her at noon.

What might this mean?

She sent to ask for Mr. Ashmead; he was not to be found; he had hidden himself too carefully.

The deputation came and thanked her for her munificent act of charity.

She looked puzzled at first, then blushed to the temples. "Munificent act, gentlemen! Alas! I did but direct my agent to distribute a small sum amongst the deserving poor. He has done very ill to court your attention. My little contribution should have been as private as it is insignificant."

"Nay, madam," said the clerk of the council, who was a recognised orator, "your agent did well to consult our worthy Burgomaster, who knows the persons most in need and most deserving. We do not doubt that you love to do good in secret. Nevertheless we have also our sense of duty, and we think it right that so benevolent an act should be published, as an example to others. In the same view, we claim to comment publicly on your goodness." Then he looked to the Burgomaster, who took him up.

"And we comment thus: Madam, since the middle ages the freedom of this town has not been possessed by any female. There is, however, no law forbidding it; and, therefore, madam, the civic authorities, whom I represent, do hereby present to you the freedom of this burgh."

He then handed her an emblazoned vellum giving her citizenship, with the reasons written plainly in golden letters.

Ina Klosking, who had remained quite quiet during the speeches, waited a moment or two; and then replied with seemly grace and dignity:—

"Mr. Burgomaster and gentlemen—you have paid me a great and unexpected compliment; and I thank you for it. But one thing makes me uneasy; it is that I have done so little to deserve this. I console myself, however, by reflecting that I am still young, and may have opportunities to show myself grateful, and even to deserve, in the future, this honour, which at present overpays me, and almost oppresses me. On that understanding, gentlemen, be pleased to bestow, and let me receive, the rare compliment you have paid me by admitting me to citizenship in your delightful town." (To herself) "I'll scold him well for this."

Low curtsey; profound bows; exit deputation enchanted with her; *manet* Klosking with the freedom of the city in her hand, and ingratitude in her heart; for her one idea was to get hold of Mr. Joseph Ashmead directly, and reproach him

severely for all this, which she justly ascribed to his machinations.

The cunning Ashmead divined her project, and kept persistently out of her way. That did not suit her neither. She was lonely. She gave the waiter a friendly line to bring him to her. Now, mind you, she was too honest to pretend she was not going to scold him. So this is what she wrote :—

"My Friend,—Have you deserted me? Come to me, and be remonstrated. What have you to fear? You know so well how to defend yourself. Ina Klosking."

Arrived in a very few minutes Mr. Ashmead, jaunty, cheerful, and defensive.

Ina, with a countenance from which all discontent was artfully extracted, laid before him, in the friendliest way you can imagine, an English Bible. It was her father's, and she always carried it with her. "I wish," said she insidiously, "to consult you on a passage or two of this book. How do you understand this—

"'When thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do?'

"And this—

"'When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly?'"

Having pointed out these sentences with her finger, she looked to him for his interpretation. Joseph, thus erected into a Scripture commentator, looked at the passages first near, and then afar off, as if the true interpretation depended on perspective. Having thus gained a little time, he said: "Well, I think the meaning is clear enough. We are to hide our own light under a bushel. But it don't say an agent is to hide his employer's."

"Be serious, sir. This is a great authority."

"Oh, of course, of course. Still—if you won't be offended, ma'am—times are changed since then. It was a very small place, where news spread of itself; and all that cannot be written for theatrical agents, because there wasn't one in creation."

"And so now, their little customs, lately invented, like themselves, are to prevail against God's im-mor-tal law!" It was something half-way between Handel and mellowed

thunder, the way her grand contralto suddenly rolled out these three words. Joseph was cunning. He put on a crushed appearance—deceived by which, the firm but gentle Klosking began to soften her tone directly.

"It has given me pain," said she sorrowfully. "And I am afraid God will be angry with us both for our ostentation."

"Not He," said Joseph consolingly. "Bless your heart, He is not half so irritable as the parsons fancy! They confound Him with themselves."

Ina ignored this suggestion with perfect dignity, and flowed on: "All I stipulate now is, that I may not see this pitiable parade in print."

"That is past praying for, then," said Ashmead resolutely. "You might as well try to stop the waves as check publicity—in our day. Your munificence to the poor—confound the lazy lot!—and the gratitude of those pompous prigs, the deputation—the presentation—your admirable reply——"

"You never heard it now——"

"Which, as you say, I was not so fortunate as to hear, and so must content myself with describing it—all this is flying north, south, east, and west."

"Oh no, no, no! You have not *advertised* it."

"Not advertised it? For what do you take me? Wait till you see the bill I am running up against you. Madam, you must take people as they are. Don't try to un-Ashmead *me*; it is impossible. Catch up that knife and kill me. I'll not resist: on the contrary, I'll sit down and prepare an obituary notice for the weeklies, and say I killed *myself*. But WHILST I BREATHE I ADVERTISE."

And Joseph was defiant; and the Klosking shrugged her noble shoulders and said, "You best of creatures, you are incurable."

To follow this incident to its conclusion: not a week after this scene, Ina Klosking detected, in an English paper—

"A CHARITABLE ACT.

"Mademoiselle Klosking, the great contralto, having won a large sum of money at the Kursaal, has given a thousand pounds to the poor of the place. The civic authorities, hearing of this, and desirous to mark their sense of so noble a donation, have presented her with the freedom of the burgh, written on vellum and gold. Mademoiselle Klosking

received the compliment with charming grace and courtesy; but her modesty is said to have been much distressed at the publicity hereby given to an act she wished to be known only to the persons relieved by her charity."

Ina caught the culprit and showed him this. "A thousand pounds!" said she. "Are you not ashamed? Was ever a niggardly act so embellished and exaggerated? I feel my face very red, sir."

"I'll explain that in a moment," said Joseph amicably. "Each nation has a coin it is always quoting. France counts in francs, Germany in thalers, America in dollars, England in pounds. When a thing costs a million francs in France, or a million dollars in the States, that is always called a million pounds in the English journals; otherwise it would convey no distinct idea at all to an Englishman. Turning thalers and francs into pounds—*that* is not *exaggeration;* it is only *translation.*"

Ina gave him such a look. He replied with an unabashed smile.

She shrugged her shoulders in silence this time, and, to the best of my belief, made no more serious attempts to un-Ashmead her Ashmead.

A month had now passed, and that was a little more than half the dreary time she had to wade through. She began to count the days, and that made her pine all the more. Time is like a kettle. Be blind to him, he flies; watch him, he lags. Her sweet temper was a little affected, and she even reproached Ashmead for holding her out false hopes that his advertisements of her gains would induce Severne to come to her, or even write. "No," said she; "there must be some greater attraction. Karl says that Miss Vizard, who called upon me, was a beauty, and dark. Perhaps she was the lovely girl I saw at the opera. She has never been there since: and he is gone to England with people of that name."

"Well, but that Miss Vizard called on you. She can't intend to steal him from you."

"But she may not know; a woman may injure another without intending. He may deceive her; he has betrayed me. Her extraordinary beauty terrifies me. It enchanted me; and how much more a man?"

Joseph said he thought this was all fancy; and as for his

advertisements, it was too early yet to pronounce on their effect.

The very day after this conversation he bounced into her room in great dudgeon. "There, madam! the advertisements *have* produced an effect; and not a pleasant one. Here's a detective on to us. He is feeling his way with Karl. I knew the man in a moment—calls himself Poikilus in print, and Smith to talk to; but he is Aaron at the bottom of it all, and can speak several languages. Confound their impudence! putting a detective on to *us*, when it is them that are keeping dark."

"Who do you think has sent him?" asked Ina intently.

"The party interested, I suppose."

"Interested in what?"

"Why, in the money you won; for he was drawing Karl about that."

"Then *he* sent the man!" And Ina began to pant and change colour.

"Well, now you put it to me, I think so. Come to look at it, it is certain. Who else *could* it be? Here is a brace of sweeps. They wouldn't be the worse for a good kicking. You say the word, and Smith shall have one, at all events."

"Alas, my friend!" said Ina, "for once you are slow. What! a messenger comes here direct from *him*, and are we so dull we can learn nothing from him who comes to question us? Let me think."

She leaned her forehead on her white hand, and her face seemed slowly to fill with intellectual power.

"That man," said she at last, "is the only link between him and me. I must speak to him."

Then she thought again.

"No, not yet. He must be detained in the house. Letters may come to him, and their postmarks may give us some clue."

"I'll recommend the house to him."

"Oh, that is not necessary. He will lodge here of his own accord. Does he know you?"

"I think not."

"Do not give him the least suspicion that you know he is a detective."

"All right, I won't."

"If he sounds you about the money, say nobody knows much about it, except Mademoiselle Klosking. If you can

get the matter so far, come and tell me. But be *you* very reserved, for you are not clear."

Ashmead received these instructions meekly, and went into the *salle à manger* and ordered dinner. Smith was there, and had evidently got some information from Karl; for he opened an easy conversation with Ashmead, and it ended in their dining together.

Smith played the open-handed countryman to the life; stood champagne. Ashmead chattered, and seemed quite off his guard. Smith approached the subject cautiously. "Gamble here as much as ever?"

"All day, some of them."

"Ladies and all?"

"Why, the ladies are the worst."

"No; are they now? Ah, that reminds me. I heard there was a lady in this very house won a pot o' money."

"It is true. I am her agent."

"I suppose she lost it all, next day?"

"Well, not all, for she gave a thousand pounds to the poor."

"The dressmakers collared the rest?"

"I cannot say. I have nothing to do, except with her theatrical business. She will make more by that than she ever made at play."

"What, is she tip-top?"

"The most rising singer in Europe."

"I should like to see her."

"That you can easily do. She sings to-night. I'll pass you in."

"You are a good fellow. Have a bit of supper with me afterwards. Bottle of fizz."

These two might be compared to a couple of spiders, each taking the other for a fly. Smith was enchanted with Ina's singing, or pretended. Ashmead was delighted with him, or pretended.

"Introduce me to her," said Smith.

"I dare not do that: you are not professional—are you?"

"No; but you can say I am, for a lark."

Ashmead said he should like to; but it would not do, unless he was very wary.

"Oh, I'm fly," said the other. "She won't get anything out of me. I've been behind the scenes often enough."

Then Ashmead said he would go and ask her if he might

present a London manager to her. He soon brought back the answer. "She is too tired to-night; but I pressed her, and she says she will be charmed if you breakfast with her to-morrow at eleven." He did not say that he was to be with her at half-past ten for special instructions. They were very simple. "My friend," said she, "I mean to tell this man something, which he will think it his duty to telegraph or write to *him* immediately. It was for this I would not have the man to supper, being after post-time. This morning he shall either write or telegraph; and then, if you are as clever in this as you are in some things, you will watch him, and find out the address he sends to."

Ashmead listened very attentively, and fell into a brown study.

"Madam," said he, at last, "this is a first-rate combination. You make him communicate with England, and I will do the rest. If he telegraphs, I'll be at his heels. If he goes to the post, I know a way: if he posts in the house, he makes it too easy."

At eleven, Ashmead introduced his friend "Sharpus, manager of Drury Lane Theatre;" and watched the fencing-match with some anxiety, Ina being little versed in guile. But she had tact and self-possession; and she was not an angel, after all, but a woman whose wits were sharpened by love and suffering.

Sharpus, *alias* Smith, played his assumed character to perfection. He gave the Klosking many incidents of business, and professional anecdotes, and was excellent company. The Klosking was gracious, and more *bonne enfant* than Ashmead had ever seen her. It was a fine match between her and the detective. At last he made his approaches.

"And I hear we are to congratulate you on success at *rouge et noir* as well as opera. Is it true that you broke the bank?"

"Perfectly," was the frank reply.

"And won a million."

"More or less," said the Klosking, with an open smile.

"I hope it was a good lump, for our countrymen leave hundreds of thousands here every season."

"It was four thousand nine hundred pounds, sir."

"Pheugh! Well, I wish it had been double. You are not so close as our friend here, madam."

"No, sir; and shall I tell you why?"

"If you like, madam," said Smith, with assumed indifference.

"Mr. Ashmead is a model agent; he never allows himself to see anybody's interest but mine. Now the truth is another person has an interest in my famous winnings. A gentleman handed £25 to Mr. Ashmead to play with. He did not do so; but I came in and joined £25 of my own to that £25, and won an enormous sum. Of course, if the gentleman chooses to be chivalrous and abandon his claim, he can; but that is not the way of the world, you know. I feel sure he will come to me for his share some day; and the sooner the better, for money burns the pocket."

Sharpus, *alias* Smith, said this was really a curious story. "Now, suppose," said he, "some fine day a letter was to come asking you to remit that gentleman his half, what should you do?"

"I should decline; it might be an *escroc.* No; Mr. Ashmead here knows the gentleman. Do you not?"

"I'll swear to him anywhere."

"Then, to receive his money, he must face the eye of Ashmead. Ha, ha!"

The detective turned the conversation, and never came back to the subject; but shortly he pleaded an engagement, and took his leave.

Ashmead lingered behind, but Ina hurried him off, with an emphatic command not to leave this man out of his sight a moment.

He violated this order; for in five minutes he ran back to tell her, in an agitated whisper, that Smith was, at that moment, writing a letter in the *salle à manger.*

"Oh, pray don't come here!" cried Ina, in despair. "Do not lose sight of him for a moment."

"Give me that letter to post then," said Ashmead, and snatched one up Ina had directed overnight.

He went to the hotel door and lighted a cigar; out came Smith with a letter in his very hand. Ashmead peered with all his eyes; but Smith held the letter vertically in his hand, and the address inwards. The letter was sealed.

Ashmead watched him, and saw he was going to the General Post. He knew a shorter cut, ran and took it, and lay in wait. As Smith approached the box, letter in hand, he bustled up in a furious hurry, and posted his own letter so as to stop Smith's hand at the very aperture before he could insert his letter. He saw, apologised, and drew

back. Smith laughed and said, "All right, old man. That is to your sweetheart, or you wouldn't be in such a hurry."

"No; it was to my grandmother," said Ashmead.

"Go on," said Smith, and poked the ribs of Joseph. They went home jocular; but the detective was no sooner out of the way, than Ashmead stole up to Ina Klosking, and put his finger to his lips; for Karl was clearing away, and in no hurry.

They sat on tenter-hooks, and thought he never would go. He did go at last, and then the Klosking and Ashmead came together like two magnets.

"Well?"

"All right! Letter to post. Saw address quite plain.—Edward Severne, Esq."

"Yes."

"Vizard Court."

"Ah!"

"Taddington—Barfordshire—England."

Ina, who was standing all on fire, now sat down and interlaced her hands. "Vizard!" said she gloomily.

"Yes; Vizard Court," said Ashmead triumphantly; "that means he is a large landed proprietor, and you will easily find him if he is there in a month."

"He will be there," said Ina. "She is very beautiful. She is dark, too, and he loves change. Oh, if to all I have suffered he adds *that*——"

"Then you will forgive him *that*," said Ashmead, shaking his head.

"Never. Look at me, Joseph Ashmead."

He looked at her with some awe, for she seemed transformed, and her Danish eye gleamed strangely.

"You, who have seen my torments and my fidelity, mark what I say: If he is false to me with another woman, I shall kill him—or else I shall hate him."

She took her desk and wrote, at Ashmead's dictation—

"VIZARD COURT,
TADDINGTON,
BARFORDSHIRE."

CHAPTER XXI

The next morning Vizard carried Lord Uxmoor away to a magistrates' meeting, and left the road clear to Severne. But Zoe gave him no opportunity until just before luncheon, and then she put on her bonnet and came downstairs; but Fanny was with her.

Severne, who was seated patiently in his bedroom with the door ajar, came out to join them, feeling sure Fanny would openly side with him, or slip away and give him his opportunity.

But, as the young ladies stood on the broad flight of steps at the hall door, an antique figure drew nigh—an old lady, the shape of an egg, so short and stout was she. On her head she wore a black silk bonnet constructed many years ago, with a droll design—viz., to keep off sun, rain, and wind; it was like an iron coal-scuttle, slightly shortened; yet have I seen some very pretty faces very prettily framed in such a bonnet. She had an old black silk gown that only reached to her ankle, and over it a scarlet cloak of superfine cloth, fine as any colonel or queen's outrider ever wore, and looking splendid, though she had used it forty years at odd times. This dame had escaped the village ill, rheumatics, and could toddle along without a staff at a great, and indeed a fearful pace; for owing to her build, she yawed so from side to side at every step, that, to them who knew her not, a capsize appeared inevitable.

"Mrs. Judge, I declare," cried Zoe.

"Ay, miss, Hannah Judge it is. Your sarvant, ma'am:" and she dropped two curtseys, one for each lady.

Mrs. Judge was Harrington's old nurse. Zoe often paid a visit to her cottage, but she never came to Vizard Court except on Harrington's birthday, when the servants entertained all the old pensioners and retainers at supper. Her sudden appearance therefore, and in gala costume, astonished Zoe. Probably Zoe's face betrayed this, for the old lady began, "You wonder to see me here, now, doan't ye?"

"Well, Mrs. Judge," said Zoe diplomatically, "nobody has a better right to come."

"You be very good, miss. I don't doubt my welcome nohow."

"But," said Zoe playfully, "you seldom do us the honour; so I *am* a little surprised. What can I do for you?"

"You does enough for me, miss, you and young Squire. I bain't come to ask no favours. I ain't one o' that sort. I'll tell ye why I be come. 'Tis to warn you all up here."

"This is alarming," said Zoe to Fanny.

"That is as may be," said Mrs. Judge: "forewarned, forearmed, the byword sayeth. There is a young 'oman a-prowling about this here parish, as don't belong to *hus*."

"La!" said Fanny; "mustn't we visit your parish, if we were not born there?"

"Don't you take me up before I be down, miss," said the old nurse, a little severely. "'Tain't for the likes of you I speak, which you are a lady, and visits the Court by permission of Squire; but what I objects to is—hinterlopers." She paused, to see the effect of so big a word, and then resumed graciously, "You see most of our hills comes from that there Hillstoke. If there's a poacher, or a thief, he is Hillstoke. They harbours the gipsies as ravages the whole country, mostly; and now they have let loose this here young 'oman on to us. She is a POLL PRY: goes about the town a-sarching: pries into their housen, and their vittels, and their very beds. Old Marks have got a muckheap at his door; for his garden, ye know. Well, miss, she sticks her parasole into this here, and turns it about, as if she was a-going to spread it: says she, 'I must know the de-com-position of this 'ere as you keeps under the noses of your young folk.' Well, I seed her a-going her rounds, and the folk had told me her ways; so I did set me down to my knitting and wait for her; and when she came to me, I offered her a seat; so she sat herself down, and says she, 'This is the one clean house in the village,' says she: 'you might eat your dinner off the floor, let alone the chairs and tables.' 'You are very good, miss,' says I. Says she, 'I wonder whether upstairs is as nice as this?' 'Well,' says I, 'them as keeps it downstairs keeps it hup; I don't drop cleanliness on the stairs, you may be sure.' 'I suppose not,' says she, 'but I should like to see.' That was what I was a-waiting for, you know, so I said to her, 'Curiosity do breed curiosity,' says I. 'Afore you sarches this here house from top to bottom, I should like to see the warrant.' 'What warrant?' says she. 'I've no warrant. Don't take me for an enemy,'

says she. 'I'm your best friend,' says she. 'I'm the new doctor.' I told her I had heard a whisper of that too; but we had got a parish doctor already, and one was enough. 'Not when he never comes anigh you,' says she, 'and lets you go half-way to meet your diseases.' 'I don't know for that,' says I, and indeed I haan't a notion what she meant, for my part; but, says I, 'I don't want no women-folk to come here a-doctoring o' me, that's sartin.' So she said, 'But suppose you were very ill, and the he-doctor three miles off, and fifty others to visit afore you?' 'That is no odds,' says I; 'I would not be doctored by a woman.' Then she says to me, says she, 'Now you look me in the face.' 'I can do that,' says I, 'you, or anybody else. I'm an honest woman, *I* am;' so I up and looked her in the face as bold as brass. 'Then,' says she, 'am I to understand that, if you was to be ill to-morrow, you would rather die than be doctored by a woman?' She thought to daant me, you see, so I says, 'Well, I don't know as I oodn't.' You do laugh, miss. Well, that is what she did. 'All right,' says she. 'Make haste and die, my good soul,' says she, 'for, while you live, you'll be a hobelisk to reform.' So she went off; but I made to the door, and called after her I should die when God pleased, and I had seen a good many young folk laid out, that looked as like to make old bones as ever she does—chalk-faced—skinny—to-a-d!! And I called after her she was no lady. No more she ain't, to come into my own house and call a decent woman 'a hobelisk!' Oh! oh! Which I never *was*, not even in my giddy days, but did work hard in my youth, and arn respect for my old age."

"Yes, nurse, yes; who doubts it?"

"And nursed young Squire, and, Lord bless your heart! a was a poor puny child when I took him to my breast, and in six months the finest chubbiest boy in all the parish; and his dry nurse for years arter, and always at his heels a-keeping him out of the stable and the ponds and consorting with the village boys; and a proper resolute child he was, and hard to manage: and my own man that is gone, and my son 'that's not so clever as some,'[1] I always done justice by them both; and arter all to be called a hobelisk, oh! oh! oh!"

Then behold the gentle Zoe with her arm round nurse's

[1] Paraphrase for the noun substantive "idiot." It is also a specimen of the Greek figure "Litotes."

neck, and her handkerchief to nurse's eyes, murmuring, "There—there—don't cry, nurse—everybody esteems you; and that lady did not mean to affront you; she did not say 'obelisk,' she said 'obstacle;' that only means that you stand in the way of her improvements; there was not much harm in that, you know. And, nurse, please give that lady her way, to oblige me; for it is by my brother's invitation she is here."

"Ye doan't say so. What! does he hold with female she-doctoresses?"

"He wishes to *try* one. She has his authority."

"Ye doan't say so."

"Indeed I do."

"Con—sarn the wench; why couldn't she say so, 'stead of hargefying?"

"She is a stranger, and means well; so she did not think it necessary. You must take my word for it."

"La, miss, I'll take your'n before hers, you *may* be sure," said Mrs. Judge, with a decided remnant of hostility.

And now a proverbial incident happened. Miss Rhoda Gale came in sight, and walked rapidly into the group.

After greeting the ladies and ignoring Severne, who took off his hat to her, with deep respect, in the background, she turned to Mrs. Judge. "Well, old lady," said she cheerfully, "and how do you do?"

Mrs. Judge replied in fawning accents, "Thank you, miss, I be well enough to get about. I was a-telling 'em about you—and, to be sure, it is uncommon good of a lady like you to trouble so much about poor folk."

"Don't mention it: it is my duty, and my inclination. You see, my good woman, it is not so easy to cure diseases as people think; therefore it is a part of medicine to prevent them: and to prevent them you must remove the predisposing causes, and to find out all those causes you must have eyes, and use them."

"You are right, miss," said La Judge obsequiously. "Prevention is better nor cure, and they say 'a stitch in time saves nine.'"

"That is capital good sense, Mrs. Judge; and pray tell the villagers that, and make them as full of 'the wisdom of nations' as you seem to be, and their houses as clean—if you can."

"I'll do my best, miss," said Mrs. Judge obsequiously; "it is the least we can all do for a young lady like you, that

leaves the pomps and vanities, and gives her mind to bettering the condishing of poor folk."

Having once taken this cue and entered upon a vein of flattery, she would have been extremely voluble—for villages can vie with cities in adulation as well as in detraction—but she was interrupted by a footman announcing luncheon.

Zoe handed Mrs. Judge over to the man with a request that he would be kind to her, and have her to dine with the servants.

Yellowplush saw the gentlefolks away, and then, parting his legs, and putting his thumbs into his waistcoat-pockets, delivered himself thus: "Well, old girl, am I to give you my harm round to the kitchen; or do you know the way by yourself?"

"Young chap," said Mrs. Judge, and turned a glittering eye, "I did know the way afore you was born; and I should know it all one if so be you was to be hung, or sent to Botany Bay—to larn manners."

Having delivered this shot, she rolled away in the direction of Roast Beef.

The little party had hardly settled at the table when they were joined by Vizard and Uxmoor; both gentlemen welcomed Miss Gale more heartily than the ladies had done, and before luncheon ended, Vizard asked her if her report was ready. She said it was.

"Have you got it with you?"

"Yes."

"Then please hand it to me."

"Oh, it is in my head! I don't write much down; that weakens the memory. If you would give me half-an-hour after luncheon——" she hesitated a little.

Zoe jaloused a *tête-à-tête*, and parried it skilfully. "Oh," said she, "but we are all much interested: are not you, Lord Uxmoor?"

"Indeed I am," said Uxmoor.

"So am I," said Fanny, who didn't care a button.

"Yes, but," said Rhoda, "truths are not always agreeable, and there are some that I don't like——" she hesitated again, and this time actually blushed a little.

The acute Mr. Severne, who had been watching her slily, came to her assistance. "Look here, old fellow," said he to Vizard; "don't you see that Miss Gale has discovered some spots in your Paradise? but out of delicacy, does not want

to publish them, but to confide them to your own ear. Then you can mend them or not."

Miss Gale turned her eyes full on Severne. "You are very keen at reading people, sir," said she drily.

"Of course he is," said Vizard. "He has given great attention to your sex. Well, if that is all, Miss Gale, pray speak out and gratify their curiosity. You and I shall never quarrel over the truth."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Miss Gale. "However, I suppose I must risk it. I never do get my own way; that's a fact."

After this little ebullition of spleen, she opened her budget. "First of all, I find that these villages all belong to one person; so does the soil: nobody can build cottages on a better model, nor make any other improvement; you are an absolute monarch. This is a piece of Russia, not England. They are all serfs, and you are the Tsar."

"It is true," said Vizard, "and it sounds horrid; but it works benignly. Every snob who can grind the poor does grind them; but a gentleman never, and he hinders others. Now, for instance, an English farmer is generally a tyrant; but my power limits his tyranny. He may discharge his labourer; but he can't drive him out of the village, nor rob him of parish relief, for poor Hodge is *my* tenant, not a snob's. Nobody can build a beer-shop in Islip. That is true. But if they could, they would sell bad beer, give credit in the ardour of competition, poison the villagers, and demoralise them. Believe me, republican institutions are beautiful on paper; but they would not work well in Barfordshire villages. However, you profess to go by experience in everything. There are open villages within five miles. I'll give you a list. Visit them. You will find that liberty can be the father of tyranny. Petty tradesmen have come in and built cottages, and ground the poor down with rents unknown in Islip; farmers have built cottages, and turned their labourers into slaves. Drunkenness, dissipation, poverty, disaffection, and misery—that is what you will find in the open villages. Now, in Islip you have an omnipotent squire, and that is an abomination in theory—a mediæval monster, a blot on modern civilisation; but practically the poor monster is a softener of poverty—an incarnate buffer between the poor and tyranny, the poor and misery."

"I'll inspect the open villages, and suspend my opinion

till then," said Miss Gale heartily; "but, in the meantime, you must admit that where there is great power there is great responsibility."

"Oh, of course."

"Well, then, your little outlying province of Hillstoke is full of rheumatic adults and putty-faced children. The two phenomena arise from one cause—the water. No lime in it; and too many reptiles. It was the children gave me the clue. I suspected the cherry-stones at first; but when I came to look into it, I found they eat just as many cherry-stones in the valley, and are as rosy as apples; but then there is well-water in the valleys. So I put this and that together, and I examined the water they drink at Hillstoke. Sir, it is full of animalculæ. Some of these cannot withstand the heat of the human stomach; but others can, for I tried them in mud artificially heated. (A giggle from Fanny Dover.) Thanks to your microscope, I have made sketches of several infusoria, who live in those boys' stomachs, and irritate their membranes, and share their scanty nourishment, besides other injuries." Thereupon she produced some drawings. They were handed round, and struck terror in gentle bosoms. "Oh, gracious!" cried Fanny, "one ought to drink nothing but champagne." Uxmoor looked grave. Vizard affected to doubt their authenticity. He said, "You may not know it, but I am a zoologist, and these are antediluvian eccentricities, that have long ceased to embellish the world we live in. Fie, Miss Gale! Down with anachronisms."

Miss Gale smiled, and admitted that one or two of the prodigies resembled antediluvian monsters; but said oracularly that Nature was fond of producing the same thing on a large scale and a small scale; and it was quite possible the small type of antediluvian monster might have survived the large.

"That is most ingenious," said Vizard; "but it does not account for this fellow. He is not an antediluvian. He is a barefaced modern; for he is A STEAM-ENGINE."

This caused a laugh, for the creature had a perpendicular neck, like a funnel, that rose out of a body like a horizontal cylinder.

"At any rate," said Miss Gale, "the little monster was in the world before us; so he is not an imitation of man's work."

"Well," said Vizard, "after all, we have had enough of the

monsters of the deep. Now we can vary the monotony, and say the monsters of the shallow. But I don't see how they can cause rheumatism."

"I never said they did," retorted Miss Gale sharply; "but the water which contains them is soft water. There is no lime in it, and that is bad for the bones in every way. Only the children drink it as it is: the wives boil it, and so drink soft water and dead reptiles in their tea. The men instinctively avoid it, and drink nothing but beer. Thus for want of a pure diluent with lime in solution, an acid is created in the blood which produces gout in the rich, and rheumatism in the poor, thanks to their meagre food, and exposure to the weather."

"Poor things!" said womanly Zoe. "What is to be done?"

"La," said Fanny, "throw lime into the ponds: that will kill the monsters, and cure the old people's bones into the bargain."

This compendious scheme struck the imagination, but did not satisfy the judgment, of the assembly.

"Fanny!" said Zoe reproachfully.

"That *would* be killing two birds with one stone," suggested Uxmoor satirically.

"The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel," explained Vizard composedly.

Zoe reiterated her question, what was to be done?

Miss Gale turned to her with a smile. "*We* have nothing to do but to point out these abominations. The person to act is the Russian autocrat, the paternal dictator, the monarch of all he surveys, and advocate of monarchical institutions. He is the buffer between the poor and all their ills, especially poison—he must dig a well."

Every eye being turned on Vizard to see how he took this, he said, a little satirically: "What! does science bid me bore for water at the top of a hill?"

"She does *so*," said the virago. "Now look here, good people."

And although they were not all good people, yet they all did look there; she shone so with intelligence, being now quite on her metal.

"Half-civilised man makes blunders that both the savage and the civilised avoid. The savage builds his hut by a running stream. The civilised man draws good water to his door, though he must lay down pipes from a highland

lake to a lowland city. It is only half-civilised man that builds a village on a hill, and drinks worms, and snakes, and efts, and antediluvian monsters in limeless water. Then I say, if great but half-civilised monarchs would consult Science *before* they built their serf-huts, Science would say, 'Don't you go and put down human habitations far from pure water—the universal diluent—the only cheap diluent—and the only liquid which does not require digestion, and therefore must always assist and never chemically resist the digestion of solids.' But, when the mischief is done, and the cottages are built on a hill three miles from water, then all that Science can do is to show the remedy, and the remedy is—boring."

"Then the remedy is like the discussion," said Fanny Dover, very pertly.

Zoe was amused but shocked. Miss Gale turned her head on the offender as sharp as a bird. "Of course it is to children," said she; "and that is why I wished to confine it to mature minds. It is to you I speak, sir. Are your subjects to drink poison, or will you bore me a well?—Oh, please!"

"Do you hear that?" said Vizard piteously to Uxmoor. "Threatened and cajoled in one breath. Who can resist this fatal sex?—Miss Gale, I will bore a well on Hillstoke common. Any idea how deep we must go—to the antipodes, or only to the centre?"

"Three hundred and thirty feet, or thereabouts."

"No more? Any idea what it will cost?"

"Of course I have. The well, the double windlass, the iron chain, the two buckets, a cupola over the well, and twenty-three keys, one for every head of a house in the hamlet, will cost you about £315."

"Why this is Detail made woman. How do you know all this?"

"From Tom Wilder."

"Who is he?"

"What! don't you know? He is the eldest son of the Islip blacksmith, and a man that will make his mark. He casts every Thursday night. He is the only village blacksmith in all the county who *casts*. You know that, I suppose."

"No; I had not the honour."

"Well, he is then: and I thought you would consent, because you are so good; and so I thought there could be

no harm in sounding Tom Wilder. He offers to take the whole contract, if Squire's agreeable; bore the well; brick it fifty yards down: he says that ought to be done, if she is to have justice. 'She' is the well: and he will also construct the gear. He says there must be two iron chains and two buckets going together; so then the empty bucket descending will help the man or woman at the windlass to draw the full bucket up. £315.—One week's income, your majesty."

"She has inspected our rent-roll, now," said Vizard pathetically; "and knows nothing about the matter."

"Except that it is a mere fleabite to you to bore through a hill for water. For all that, I hope you will leave me to battle it with Tom Wilder; then you won't be cheated for once. *You always are,* and it is abominable. It would have been five hundred if you had opened the business."

"I am sure that is true," said Zoe. She added this would please Mrs. Judge: she was full of the superiority of Islip to Hillstoke.

"Stop a bit," said Vizard. "Miss Gale has not reported on Islip yet."

"No, dear; but she has looked into everything, for Mrs. Judge told me. You have been into the cottages?"

"Yes."

"Into Marks's?"

"Yes, I have been into Marks's."

She did not seem inclined to be very communicative; so Fanny, out of mischief, said pertly, "And what did you see there—with your Argus eye?"

"I saw—three generations."

"Ha! ha! La! did you now? And what were they all doing?"

"They were all living together, night and day, in one room."

This conveyed no very distinct idea to the ladies; but Vizard, for the first time, turned red at this revelation before Uxmoor, improver of cottage life. "Confound the brutes!" said he. "Why, I built them a new room—a larger one; didn't you see it?"

"Yes. They stack their potatoes in it."

"Just like my people," said Uxmoor. "That is the worst of it; they resist their own improvement."

"Yes, but," said the doctress, "with monarchical power we can trample on them for their good. Outside Marks's

door at the back there is a muck-heap, as he calls it; all the refuse of the house is thrown there: it is a horrible melange of organic matter and decaying vegetables, a hotbed of malaria. Suffocated and poisoned with the breath of a dozen persons, they open the window for fresh air, and in rushes Fever from the stronghold its victims have built. Two children were buried from that house last year. They were both killed by the domestic arrangements as certainly as if they had been shot with a double-barrelled pistol. The outside roses you admire so are as delusive as flattery; their sweetness covers a foul, unwholesome den."

"Marks's cottage! The showplace of the village!" Zoe Vizard flushed with indignation at the bold hand of truth so rudely applied to a pleasant and cherished illusion.

Vizard, more candid and open to new truths, shrugged his shoulders and said, "What can I do more than I have done?"

"Oh, it is not your fault," said the doctress graciously; "it is theirs. Only, as you are their superior in intelligence and power, you might do something to put down indecency, immorality, and disease."

"May I ask what?"

"Well, you might build a granary for the poor people's potatoes. No room can keep them dry; but you build your granary upon four pillars: then that is like a room over a cellar."

"Well, I'll build it so—if I build it at all," said Vizard drily. "What next?"

"Then you could make them stack their potatoes in the granary, and use the spare room, and so divide their families, and give morality a chance. The muck-heap you should disperse at once with the strong hand of power."

At this last proposal, Squire Vizard—the truth must be told—delivered a long ploughman's whistle at the head of his own table.

"Pheugh!" said he; "for a lady that is more than half republican, you seem to be taking very kindly to monarchical tyranny."

"Well, now, I'll tell you the truth," said she. "You have converted me. Ever since you promised me the well, I have discovered that the best form of government is a good-hearted tyrant."

"With a female viceroy over him, eh?"

"Only in these little domestic matters," said Rhoda depre-

catingly. "Women are good advisers in such things. The male physician relies on drugs. Medical women are wanted to moderate that delusion; to prevent disease by domestic vigilance, and cure it by well-selected esculents and pure air. These will cure fifty for one that medicine can: besides, drugs kill ever so many; these never killed a creature. You will give me the granary, won't you? Oh, and there's a black pond in the centre of the village. Your tenant Pickett, who is a fool—begging his pardon—lets all his liquid manure run out of his yard into the village till it accumulates in a pond right opposite the five cottages they call New Town; and its exhalations taint the air. There are as many fevers in Islip as in the back-slums of a town. You might fill the pond up with chalk, and compel Pickett to sink a tank in his yard, and cover it; then an agricultural treasure would be preserved for its proper use, instead of being perverted into a source of infection."

Vizard listened civilly, and as she stopped, requested her to go on.

"I think we have had enough," said Zoe bitterly.

Rhoda, who was in love with Zoe, hung her head and said, "Yes; I have been very bold."

"Fiddlestick!" said Vizard. "Never mind those girls; *you* speak out like a man; a stranger's eye always discovers things that escape the natives. Proceed."

"No: I won't proceed till I have explained to Miss Vizard."

"You may spare yourself the trouble. Miss Vizard thought Islip was a Paradise. You have dispelled the illusion, and she will never forgive you. Miss Dover will; because she is like Gallio—she careth for none of these things."

"Not a pin," said Fanny, with admirable frankness.

"Well, but," said Rhoda naïvely, "I can't bear Miss Vizard to be angry with me; I admire her so. Please let me explain. Islip is no Paradise—quite the reverse; but the faults of Islip are not *your* faults. The children are ignorant; but you pay for a school. The people are poor from insufficient wages; but you are not paymaster. *Your* gardeners, *your* hinds, and all your outdoor people have enough. You give them houses. You let cottages and gardens to the rest at half their value; and very often they don't pay that, but make excuses; and you accept them, though they are all stories; for they can pay everybody but you, and their one good bargain is with you. Miss Vizard

has carried a basket all her life with things from your table for the poor."

Miss Vizard blushed crimson at this sudden revelation.

"If a man or a woman has served your house long, there's a pension for life. You are easy, kind, and charitable. It is the faults of others I ask you to cure, because you have such power. Now, for instance, if the boys at Hillstoke are putty-faced, the boys at Islip have no calves to their legs. That is a sure sign of a deteriorating species. The lower type of savage has next to no calf. The calf is a sign of civilisation and due nourishment. This single phenomenon was my clue, and led me to others; and I have examined the mothers and the people of all ages, and I tell you it is a village of starvelings. Here a child begins life a starveling, and ends as he began. The nursing-mother has not food enough for one, far less for two. The man's wages are insufficient, and the diet is not only insufficient, but injudicious. The race has declined. There are only five big, strong men in Islip—Josh Grace, Will Hudson, David Wilder, Absalom Green, and Jack Greenaway; and they are all over fifty—men of another generation. I have questioned these men how they were bred, and they all say milk was common when they were boys. Many poor people kept a cow; Squire doled it; the farmers gave it, or sold it cheap; but nowadays it is scarcely to be had. Now that is not your fault, but you are the man who can mend it. New milk is meat and drink, especially to young and growing people. You have a large meadow at the back of the village. If you could be persuaded to start four or five cows, and let somebody sell their new milk to the poor at cost price—say five farthings the quart. You must not give it, or they will water their muck-heaps with it. With those cows alone you will get rid, in the next generation, of the half-grown, slouching men, the hollow-eyed, narrow-chested, round-backed women, and the calfless boys one sees all over Islip, and restore the stalwart race that filled the little village under your sires, and have left proofs of their wholesome food on the tombstones: for I have read every inscription, and far more people reached eighty-five between 1750 and 1800 than betwen 1820 and 1870. Ah! how I envy you to be able to do such great things so easily! Water to poisoned Hillstoke with one hand; milk to starved Islip with the other. This is to be indeed a king!"

The enthusiast rose from the table in her excitement, and her face was transfigured; she looked beautiful for the moment.

"I'll do it," shouted Vizard; "and you are a trump."

Miss Gale sat down, and the colour left her cheek entirely.

Fanny Dover, who had a very quick eye for passing events, cried out, "Oh dear! she is going to faint *now*." The tone implied, what a diversified plague she is!

Thereupon Severne rushed to her, and was going to sprinkle her face; but she faltered, "No! no! a glass of wine." He gave her one with all the hurry and *empressement* in the world. She fixed him with a strange look as she took it from him: she sipped it; one tear ran into it. She said she had excited herself. But she was all right now. Elastic Rhoda!

"I am very glad of it," said Vizard. "You are quite strong enough, without fainting. For heaven's sake, don't add woman's weakness to your artillery, or you will be irresistible; and I shall have to divide Vizard Court amongst the villagers. At present I get off cheap, and science on the rampage: let me see, only a granary—a well—and six cows."

"They'll give us as much milk as twelve cows without the well," said Fanny; it was her day for wit.

This time she was rewarded with a general laugh.

It subsided, as such things will, and then Vizard said solemnly, "New ideas are suggested to me by this charming interview; and permit me to give them a form, which will doubtless be new to these accomplished ladies.

"'Gien there's a hole in a' your coats,
I rede ye tent it;
A chiel's amang ye takin' notes,
And faith he'll prent it.'"

Zoe looked puzzled, and Fanny inquired what language that was.

"Very good language.'

"Then perhaps you will translate it into language one can understand?"

"The English of the day, eh?"

"Yes."

"You think that would improve it, do you? Well, then—

"'If there is a defect in any one of your habiliments,
Let me earnestly impress on you the expediency of repairing it;
An individual is amongst you with singular powers of observation,
Which will infallibly result in printing and publication.'

Zoe, you are an affectionate sister; take this too observant lady into the garden, poison her with raw fruit, and bury her under a pear-tree."

Zoe said she would carry out part of the programme, if Miss Gale would come.

Then the ladies rose and rustled away, and the rivals would have followed, but Vizard detained them on the pretence of consulting them about the well; but, when the ladies had gone, he owned he had done it out of his hatred to the sex. He said he was sure both girls disliked his virago in their hearts, so he had compelled them to spend an hour together, without any man to soften their asperity.

This malicious experiment was tolerably successful. The three ladies strolled together, dismal as souls in purgatory. One or two little attempts at conversation were made, but died out for want of sympathy. Then Fanny tried personalities, the natural topic of the sex in general.

"Miss Gale, which do you admire most—Lord Uxmoor, or Mr. Severne?"

"For their looks?"

"Oh, of course."

"Mr. Severne."

"You don't admire beards then?"

"That depends. Where the mouth is well shaped and expressive, the beard spoils it. Where it is commonplace, the beard hides its defect, and gives a manly character. As a general rule, I think the male bird looks well with his crest and feathers."

"And so do I," said Fanny warmly; "and yet I should not like Mr. Severne to have a beard. Don't you think he is very handsome?"

"He is something more," said Rhoda; "he is beautiful. If he was dressed as a woman, the gentlemen would all run after him. I think his is the most perfect oval face I ever saw."

"But you must not fall in love with him," said Fanny.

"I do not mean to," said Rhoda. "Falling in love is not my business: and if it was, I should not select Mr. Severne."

"Why not, pray?" inquired Zoe haughtily. Her manner was so menacing, that Rhoda did not like to say too much just then. She felt her way.

"I am a physiognomist," said she, "and I don't think

he can be very truthful. He is old of his age, and there are premature marks under his eyes that reveal craft, and perhaps dissipation. These are hardly visible in the room, but they are in the open air, when you get the full light of day. To be sure, just now his face is marked with care and anxiety: that young man has a good deal on his mind."

Here the observer discovered that even this was a great deal too much. Zoe was displeased, and felt affronted by her remarks, though she did not condescend to notice them, so Rhoda broke off and said, "It is not fair of you, Miss Dover, to set me giving my opinion of people you must know better than I do. Oh, what a garden!" And she was off directly on a tour of inspection. "Come along," said she, "and I will tell you their names and properties."

They could hardly keep up with her, she was so eager. The fruits did not interest her, but only the simples. She was downright learned in these, and found a surprising number. But the fact is, Mr. Lucas had a respect for his predecessors. What they had planted he seldom uprooted —at least he always left a specimen. Miss Gale approved his system highly, until she came to a row of leaves planted by the side of the horse-radish.

"This is too bad, even for Islip," said Miss Gale. "Here is one of our deadliest poisons planted by the very side of an esculent root, which it resembles. You don't happen to have hired the devil for gardener at any time, do you? Just fancy! any cook might come out here for horse-radish, and gather this plant, and lay you all dead at your own table. It is the *Aconitum* of medicine, the monk's-hood or wolf's-bane of our ancestors. Call the gardener, please, and have every bit of it pulled up by the roots. None of your lives are safe while poisons and esculents are planted together like this."

And she would not budge till Zoe directed a gardener to dig up all the Aconite. A couple of them went to work and soon uprooted it. The gardeners then asked if they should burn it.

"Not for all the world," said Miss Gale. "Make a bundle of it for me to take home. It is only poison in the hands of ignoramuses. It is most sovereign medicine. I shall make tinctures, and check many a sharp ill with it. Given in time, it cuts down fever wonderfully; and when you check the fever you check the disease."

Soon after this Miss Gale said she had not come to stop; she was on her way to Taddington to buy lint and German styptics, and many things useful in domestic surgery: "for," said she, "the people at Hillstoke are relenting; at least they run to me with their cut fingers and black eyes, though they won't trust me with their sacred rheumatics. I must also supply myself with vermifuges till the well is dug, and so mitigate puerile puttiness and internal torments."

The other ladies were not sorry to get rid of an irrelevant zealot, who talked neither love nor dress, nor anything that reaches the soul.

So Zoe said, "What! going already?" and having paid that tax to politeness, returned to the house with alacrity.

But the doctress would not go without her wolf's-bane, Aconite yclept.

The irrelevant zealot being gone, the true business of the mind was resumed; and that is love-making, or novelists give us false pictures of life—and that is impossible.

As the doctress drove from the front door, Lord Uxmoor emerged from the library, a coincidence that made both girls smile; he hoped Miss Vizard was not too tired to take another turn.

"Oh no!" said Zoe; "are you, Fanny?"

At the first step they took, Severne came round an angle of the building and joined them. He had watched from the balcony of his bedroom.

Both men looked black at each other, and made up to Zoe. She felt uncomfortable, and hardly knew what to do. However, she would not seem to observe, and was polite, but a little stiff, to both.

However, at last, Severne, having asserted his rights, as he thought, gave way, but not without a sufficient motive, as may be gathered from his first word to Fanny.

"My dear friend—for heaven's sake, what is the matter? She is angry with me about something. What is it? has she told you?"

"Not a word. But I see she is in a fury with you; and really it is too ridiculous. You told a fib; that is the mighty matter, I do believe. No, it isn't, for you have told her a hundred, no doubt, and she liked you all the better; but this time you have been naughty enough to be found out, and she is romantic, and thinks her lover ought to be the soul of truth."

"Well, and so he ought," said Ned.

"He isn't, then;" and Fanny burst out laughing so loud that Zoe turned round and enveloped them both in one haughty glance, as the exaggerating Gaul would say.

"La! there was a look for you!" said Fanny pertly; "as if I cared for her black brows."

"I do, though: pray remember that."

"Then tell no more fibs. Such a fuss about nothing. What is a fib?" and she turned up her little nose very contemptuously at all such trivial souls as minded a little mendacity.

Indeed she disclaimed the importance of veracity so imperiously that Severne was betrayed into saying, "Well, not much, between you and me; and I'll be bound I can explain it."

"Explain it to me, then."

"Well, but I don't know——"

"Which of your fibs it was."

Another silver burst of laughter. But Zoe only vouchsafed a slightly contemptuous movement of her shoulders.

"Well, no," said Severne, half laughing himself at the sprightly jade's smartness.

"Well, then, that friend of yours that called at luncheon." Severne turned grave directly. "Yes," said he.

"You said he was your lawyer, and came about a lease."

"So he did."

"And his name was Jackson."

"So it was."

"This won't do. You mustn't fib to me! It was Poikilus, a Secret Inquiry; and they all know it: now tell me, without a fib—if you can—whatever did you want with Poikilus?"

Severne looked aghast. He faltered out, "Why, how could they know?"

"Why, he advertises—stupid—and Lord Uxmoor and Harrington had seen it. Gentlemen *read* advertisements. That is one of their peculiarities."

"Of course he advertises: that is not what I mean. I did not drop this card, did I? No, I am sure I pocketed it directly. What mischief-making villain told them it was Poikilus?"

Fanny coloured a little, but said hastily, "Ah, that I could not tell you."

"The footman perhaps?"

"I should not wonder." [What is a fib?]

"Curse him!"

"Oh, don't swear at the servants; that is bad taste."

"Not when he has ruined me."

"Ruined you? nonsense. Make up some other fib, and excuse the first."

"I can't. I don't know what to do; and before my rival, too! This accounts for the air of triumph he has worn ever since, and her glances of scorn and pity. She is an angel, and I have lost her."

"Stuff and nonsense," said Fanny Dover. "Be a man, and tell me the truth."

"Well, I will," said he; "for I am in despair. It is all that cursed money at Homburg. I could not clear my estate without it. I dare not go for it. She forbade me; and indeed I can't bear to leave her for anything; so I employed Poikilus to try and learn whether that lady has the money still, and whether she means to rob me of it or not."

Fanny Dover reflected a moment, then delivered herself thus: "You were wrong to tell a fib about it. What you must do now, brazen it out. Tell her you love her, but have got your pride, and will not come into her family a pauper. Defy her, to be sure: we like to be defied now and then, when we are fond of the fellow."

"I will do it," said he; "but she shuns me. I can't get a word with her."

Fanny said she would try and manage that for him; and as the rest of their talk might not interest the reader, and certainly would not edify him, I pass on to the fact that she did, that very afternoon, go into Zoe's room, and tell her Severne was very unhappy: he had told a fib; but it was not intended to deceive her, and he wished to explain the whole thing.

"Did he explain it to you?" asked Zoe, rather sharply.

"No; but he said enough to make me think you are using him very hardly. To be sure, you have another string to your bow."

"Oh, that is the interpretation you put."

"It is the true one. Do you think you can make *me* believe you would have shied him so long if Lord Uxmoor had not been in the house?"

Zoe bridled but made no reply, and Fanny went to her own room laughing.

Zoe was much disturbed. She secretly longed to hear Severne justify himself. She could not forgive a lie, nor esteem a liar. She was one of those who could pardon

certain things in a woman she would not forgive in a man. Under a calm exterior, she had suffered a noble distress; but her pride would not let her show it. Yet now that he had appealed to her for a hearing, and Fanny knew he had appealed, she began to falter.

Still Fanny was not altogether wrong. The presence of a man incapable of a falsehood, and that man devoted to her, was a little damaging to Severne, though not so much as Miss Artful thought.

However, this very afternoon, Lord Uxmoor had told her he must leave Vizard Court to-morrow morning.

So Zoe said to herself, "I need not make opportunities; after to-morrow he will find plenty."

She had an instinctive fear he would tell more falsehoods, to cover those he had told; and then she should despise him, and they would both be miserable; for she felt, for a moment, a horrible dread that she might both love and despise the same person, if it was Edward Severne.

There were several people to dinner, and, as hostess, she managed not to think too much of either of her admirers.

However, a stolen glance showed her they were both out of spirits. She felt sorry. Her nature was very pitiful. She asked herself was it her fault; and did not quite acquit herself. Perhaps she ought to have been more open, and declared her sentiments. Yet would that have been modest in a lady who was not formally engaged? She was puzzled. She had no experience to guide her: only her high breeding and her virginal instincts.

She was glad when the night ended.

She caught herself wishing the next day was gone too.

When she retired Uxmoor was already gone, and Severne opened the door to her. He fixed his eyes on her so imploringly it made her heart melt; but she only blushed high, and went away sad and silent.

As her maid was undressing her she caught sight of a letter on her table. "What is that?" said she.

"It is a letter," said Rosa, very demurely.

Zoe divined that the girl had been asked to put it there.

Her bosom heaved, but she would not encourage such proceedings, nor let Rosa see how eager she was to hear those very excuses she had evaded.

But, for all that, Rosa knew she was going to read it, for she only had her gown taken off and a *peignoir* substituted, and her hair let down and brushed a little. Then she dis-

missed Rosa, locked the door, and pounced on the letter. It lay on her table with the seal uppermost. She turned it round: it was not from *him;* was from Lord Uxmoor.

She sat down and read it.

"DEAR MISS VIZARD,—I have had no opportunities of telling you all I feel for you, without attracting an attention that might have been unpleasant to you; but I am sure you must have seen that I admired you at first sight. That was admiration of your beauty and grace, though even then you showed me a gentle heart and a sympathy that made me grateful. But now I have had the privilege of being under the same roof with you, it is admiration no longer—it is deep and ardent love; and I see that my happiness depends on you. Will you confide *your* happiness to me? I don't know that I could make you as proud and happy as I should be myself; but I should try very hard, out of gratitude as well as love. We have also certain sentiments in common. That would be one bond more.

"But indeed I feel I cannot make my love a good bargain to you, for you are peerless, and deserve a much better lot in every way than I can offer. I can only kneel to you and say, 'Zoe Vizard, if your heart is your own to give, pray be my lover, my queen, my wife.'

"Your faithful servant and devoted admirer,

"UXMOOR."

"Poor fellow!" said Zoe, and her eyes filled. She sat quite quiet with the letter open in her hand.

She looked at it, and murmured, "A pearl is offered me here: wealth, title, all that some women sigh for; and—what I value above all—a noble nature, a true heart, and a soul above all meanness. No; Uxmoor will never tell a falsehood. He *could* not."

She sighed deeply and closed her eyes. All was still. The light was faint; yet she closed her eyes, like a true woman, to see the future clearer.

Then, in the sober and deep calm, there seemed to be faint peeps of coming things: it appeared a troubled sea, and Uxmoor's strong hand stretched out to rescue her. If she married him she knew the worst,—an honest man she esteemed, and had almost an affection for—but no love.

As some have an impulse to fling themselves from a height, she had one to give herself to Uxmoor, quietly, irrevocably, by three written words despatched that night.

But it was only an impulse. If she had written it, she would have torn it up.

Presently a light thrill passed through her; she wore a sort of half-furtive, guilty look, and opened the window.

Ay, there he stood in the moonlight, waiting to be heard.

She did not start, nor utter any exclamation. Somehow or other she almost *knew* he was there before she opened the window.

"Well?" said she, with a world of meaning.

"You grant me a hearing at last."

"I do. But it is no use. You cannot explain away a falsehood."

"Of course not. I am here to confess that I told a falsehood. But it was not you I wished to deceive. I was going to explain the whole thing to you and tell you all; but there is no getting a word with you since that lord came."

"He had nothing to do with it. I should have been just as much shocked."

"But it would only have been for five minutes. Zoe!"

"Well?"

"Just put yourself in my place. A detective, who ought to have written to me in reply to my note, surprises me with a call. I was ashamed that such a visitor should enter your brother's house to see me. There sat my rival—an aristocrat. I was surprised into disowning the unwelcome visitor, and calling him my solicitor."

Now, if Zoe had been an Old Bailey counsel she would have kept him to the point, reminded him that his visitor was unseen, and fixed a voluntary falsehood on him; but she was not an experienced cross-examiner, and perhaps she was at heart as indignant at the detective as at the falsehood: so she missed her advantage, and said indignantly, "And what business had you with a detective? Your having one at all, and then calling him your solicitor, makes one think all manner of things."

"I should have told you all about it that afternoon; only our intercourse is broken off, to please a rival. Suppose I gave you a rival, and used you, for her sake, as you use me for his, what would you say? That would be a worse infidelity than sending for a detective, would it not?"

Zoe replied haughtily, "You have no right to say you have a rival,—how dare you? Besides," said she, a little ruefully, "it is you who are on your defence, not me."

"True; I forgot that. Recrimination is not convenient, is it?"

"I can escape it by shutting the window," said Zoe coldly.

"Oh, don't do that. Let me have the bliss of seeing you, and I will submit to a good deal of injustice without a murmur."

"The detective?" said Zoe sternly.

"I sent for him, and gave him his instructions, and he has gone for me to Homburg."

"Ah!—I thought so. What for?"

"About my money. To try and find out whether they mean to keep it."

"Would you really take it if they would give it you?"

"Of course I would."

"Yet you know my mind about it."

"I know you forbade me to go for it in person: and I obeyed you, did I not?"

"Yes, you did—at the time."

"I do now. You object to my going in person to Homburg. You know I was once acquainted with that lady, and you feel about her a little of what I feel about Lord Uxmoor; about a tenth part of what I feel, I suppose, and with not one-tenth so much reason. Well, I know what the pangs of jealousy are: I will never inflict them on you, as you have on me. But I *will* have my money, whether you like or not."

Zoe looked amazed at being defied. It was new to her. She drew up, but said nothing.

Severne went on: "And I will tell you why; because without money I cannot have you. My circumstances have lately improved: with my money that lies in Homburg I can now clear my family estate of all encumbrance, and come to your brother for your hand. Oh, I shall be a very bad match even then, but I shall not be a pauper, nor a man in debt. I shall be one of your own class, as I was born—a small landed gentleman with an unencumbered estate."

"That is not the way to my affection. I do not care for money."

"But other people do. Dear Zoe, you have plenty of pride yourself; you must let me have a little. Deeply as I love you, I could not come to your brother and say, 'Give me your sister, and maintain us both.' No, Zoe, I cannot ask your hand till I have cleared my estate: and I cannot

clear it without that money. For once I must resist you, and take my chance. There is wealth and a title offered you. I won't ask you to dismiss them and take a pauper. If you don't like me to try for my own money, give your hand to Lord Uxmoor: then I shall recall my detective, and let all go; for poverty or wealth will matter nothing to me: I shall have lost the angel I love; and she once loved me."

He faltered, and the sad cadence of his voice melted her. She began to cry. He turned his head away, and cried too.

There was a silence. Zoe broke it first.

"Edward," said she softly.

"Zoe!"

"You need not defy me. I would not humiliate you for all the world. Will it comfort you to know that I have been very unhappy ever since you lowered yourself so? I will try and accept your explanation."

He clasped his hands with gratitude.

"Edward, will you grant me a favour?"

"Can you ask?"

"It is to have a little more confidence in one who—— Now you must obey me implicitly, and perhaps we may both be happier to-morrow night than we are to-night. Directly after breakfast take your hat, and walk to Hillstoke. You can call on Miss Gale, if you like; and say something civil."

"What! go and leave you alone with Lord Uxmoor?"

"Yes."

"Ah, Zoe! you know your power. Have a little mercy."

"Perhaps I may have a great deal, if you obey me."

"I *will* obey you."

"Then go to bed this minute."

She gave him a heavenly smile, and closed the window.

Next morning, as soon as breakfast was over, Ned Severne said, "Any messages for Hillstoke? I am going to walk up there this morning."

"Embrace my virago for me," said Vizard.

Severne begged to be excused.

He hurried off, and Lord Uxmoor felt a certain relief.

The Master of Arts asked himself what he could do to propitiate the female M.D. He went to the gardener and got him to cut a huge bouquet, choice and fragrant, and he

carried it all the way to Hillstoke. Miss Gale was at home. As he was introduced rather suddenly, she started and changed colour, and said sharply, "What do you want?" Never asked him to sit down, rude Thing.

He stood hanging his head like a culprit, and said, with well-feigned timidity, that he came by desire of Miss Vizard, to inquire how she was getting on, and to hope the people were beginning to appreciate her.

"Oh! that alters the case; any messenger from Miss Vizard is welcome. Did she send me these flowers too? They are beautiful."

"No; I gathered them myself. I have always understood ladies love flowers."

"It is only by report you know that, eh? Let me add something to your information: a good deal depends on the giver; and you may fling these out of the window." She tossed them to him.

The Master of Arts gave a humble, patient sigh, and threw the flowers out of the window, which was open. He then sank into a chair and hid his face in his hands.

Miss Gale coloured and bit her lip. She did not think he would have done that, and it vexed her economical soul. She cast a piercing glance at him, then resumed her studies, and ignored his presence.

But his patience exhausted hers. He sat there twenty minutes, at least, in a state of collapse that bade fair to last for ever.

So presently she looked up and affected to start. "What! are you there still?" said she.

"Yes," said he; "you did not dismiss me—only my poor flowers."

"Well," said she apologetically, "the truth is, I'm not strong enough to dismiss you by the same road."

"It is not necessary. You have only to say 'Go.'"

"Oh, that would be rude. Could not you go without being told right out?"

"No, I could not. Miss Gale, I can't account for it, but there is some strange attraction. You hate me, and I fear you, yet I could follow you about like a dog; let me sit here a little longer, and see you work."

Miss Gale leaned her head upon her hand, and contemplated him at great length. Finally she adopted a cat-like course. "No," said she at last; "I am going my rounds: you can come with me, if I am so attractive."

He said he should be proud, and she put on her hat in thirty seconds.

They walked together in silence. He felt as if he was promenading a tiger-cat, that might stop any moment to fall upon him.

She walked him into a cottage: there was a little dead wood burning on that portion of the brick floor called the hearth. A pale old man sat close to the fire, in a wooden arm-chair. She felt his pulse, and wrote him a prescription:—

"To Mr. Vizard's housekeeper, Vizard Court.

"Please give the bearer two pounds of good roast-beef, or mutton, not salted, and one pint port wine.

"RHODA GALE, M.D."

"Here, Jenny," she said, to a sharp little girl, the man's grand-niece, "take this down to Vizard Court, and if the housekeeper objects, go to the front door, and demand, in my name, to see the Squire, or Miss Vizard, and give *them* the paper. Don't you give it up without the meat. Take this basket on your arm."

Then she walked out of the cottage, and Severne followed her; he ventured to say that was a novel prescription.

She explained. "Physicians are obliged to send the rich to the chemist, or else the fools would think they were slighted. But we need not be so nice with the poor; we can prescribe to do them good. When you inflicted your company on me, I was sketching out a treatise, to be entitled 'Cure of Disorders by Esculents.' That old man is nearly *exsanguis.* There is not a drug in creation that could do him an atom of good. Nourishing food may. If not, why he is booked for the long journey! Well, he has had his innings. He is fourscore. Do you think *you* will ever see fourscore; you and your vices?"

"Oh, no. But I think *you* will; and I hope so: for you go about doing good."

"And some people one could name go about doing mischief."

Severne made no reply.

Soon after they discovered a little group, principally women and children. These were inspecting something on the ground, and chattering excitedly. The words of dire import, "She have possessed him with a devil," struck their

ear. But soon they caught sight of Miss Gale, and were dead silent. She said, "What is the matter? Oh, I see; the vermifuge has acted."

It was so: a putty-faced boy had been unable to eat his breakfast; had suffered malaise for hours afterwards, and at last had been seized with nausea, and had restored to the world they so adorn a number of amphibia, which now, to judge by their movements, bitterly regretted the reckless impatience with which they had fled from an unpleasant medicine to a cold-hearted world.

"Well, good people," said Miss Gale, "what are you making a fuss about? Are they better in the boy, or out of him?"

The women could not find their candour at a moment's notice, but old Giles replied heartily, "Why, hout!! better an empty house than a bad tenant."

"That is true," said half-a-dozen voices at once. They could resist common-sense in its liquid form, but not when solidified into a proverb.

"Catch me the boy," said Miss Gale severely.

Habitual culpability destroys self-confidence; so the boy suspected himself of crime, and instantly took to flight. His companions loved hunting; so three swifter boys followed him with a cheerful yell, secured him, and brought him up for sentence.

"Don't be frightened, Jacob," said the doctress; "I only want to know whether you feel better or worse."

His mother put in her word. "He was ever so bad all the morning."

"Hold your jaw," said old Giles, "and let the boy tell his own tale."

"Well, then," said Jacob, "I was mortal bad, but now I do feel like a feather; wust on't is, I be so blessed hungry now. Dall'd if I couldn't eat the devil—stuffed with thunder and lightning."

"I'll prescribe accordingly," said Miss Gale, and wrote in pencil an order on a beef-steak pie they had sent her from the Court.

The boy's companions put their heads together over this order, and offered their services to escort him.

"No, thank you," said the doctress; "he will go alone, you young monkeys. Your turn will come."

Then she proceeded on her rounds, with Mr. Severne at her heels, until it was past one o'clock.

Then she turned round and faced him. "We will part here," said she, "and I will explain my conduct to you, as you seem in the dark. I have been co-operating with Miss Vizard all this time. I reckon she sent you out of the way to give Lord Uxmoor his opportunity, so I have detained you. Whilst you have been studying medicine, he has been popping the question, of course. Good-bye, Mr. Villain."

Her words went through the man like cold steel. It was one woman reading another. He turned very white, and put his hand to his heart. But he recovered himself and said, "If she prefers another to me, I must submit. It is not my absence for a few hours that will make the difference. You cannot make me regret the hours I have passed in your company. Good-bye;" and he seemed to leave her very reluctantly.

"One word," said she, softening a little. "I'm not proof against your charm. Unless I see Zoe Vizard in danger, you have nothing to fear from me. But I love *her*, you understand."

He returned to her directly, and said, in most earnest, supplicating tones, "But will you ever forgive me?"

"I will try."

And so they parted.

He went home at a great rate; for Miss Gale s insinuations had raised some fear in his breast.

Meantime this is what had really passed between Zoe and Lord Uxmoor. Vizard went to his study, and Fanny retired at a signal from Zoe. She rose, but did not go; she walked slowly towards the window: Uxmoor joined her; for he saw he was to have his answer from her mouth.

Her bosom heaved a little, and her cheek flushed. "Lord Uxmoor," she said, "you have done me the greatest honour any man can pay a woman, and from you it is indeed an honour. I could not write such an answer as I could wish; and, besides, I wish to spare you all the mortification I can."

"Ah!" said Uxmoor piteously.

"You are worthy of any lady's love; but I have only my esteem to give you, and that was given long ago."

Uxmoor, who had been gradually turning very white, faltered, "I had my fears. Good-bye."

She gave him her hand. He put it respectfully to his lips; then turned and left her, sick at heart, but too

brave to let it be seen. He preferred her esteem to her pity.

By this means he got both. She put her handkerchief to her eyes without disguise. But he only turned at the door to say, in a pretty firm voice, "God bless you!"

In less than an hour he drove his team from the door, sitting heart-broken and desolate, but firm and unflinching as a rock.

So then, on his return from Hillstoke, Severne found them all at luncheon except Uxmoor. He detailed his visit to Miss Gale, and whilst he talked, observed. Zoe was beaming with love and kindness. He felt sure she had not deceived him. He learned, by merely listening, that Lord Uxmoor was gone, and he exulted inwardly.

After luncheon, elysium. He walked with the two girls, and Fanny lagged behind; and Zoe proved herself no coquette. A coquette would have been a little cross, and shown him she had made a sacrifice. Not so Zoe Vizard. She never told him, nor even Fanny, she had refused Lord Uxmoor. She esteemed the great sacrifice she had made for him as a little one, and so loved him a little more, that he had cost her an earl's coronet and a large fortune.

The party resumed their habits that Uxmoor had interrupted; and no warning voice was raised.

The boring commenced at Hillstoke, and Doctress Gale hovered over the work. The various strata and their fossil deposits were an endless study, and kept her microscope employed. With this and her treatise on "Cure by Esculents," she was so employed that she did not visit the Court for some days: then came an invitation from Lord Uxmoor to stay a week with him, and inspect his village. She accepted it, and drove herself in the bailiff's gig, all alone. She found her host attending to his duties, but dejected; so then she suspected, and turned the conversation to Zoe Vizard, and soon satisfied herself he had no hopes in that quarter. Yet he spoke of her with undisguised and tender admiration. Then she said to herself, "This is a man, and he shall have her."

She sat down and wrote a letter to Vizard, telling him all she knew, and what she thought—viz., that another woman, and a respectable one, had a claim on Mr. Severne, which ought to be closely inquired into, *and the lady's version heard.* "Think of it," said she. "He disowned the woman who had saved his life, he was so afraid I

should tell Miss Vizard under what circumstances I first saw him."

She folded and addressed the letter.

But, having relieved her mind, in some degree, by this, she asked herself whether it would not be kinder to all parties to try and save Zoe without an exposure. Probably Severne benefited by his grace and his disarming qualities; for her ultimate resolution was to give him a chance—offer him an alternative: he must either quietly retire, or be openly exposed.

So then she put the letter in her desk, made out her visit, of which no further particulars can be given at present, returned home, and walked down to the Court next morning, to have it out with Edward Severne.

But unfortunately, from the very day she offered him terms up at Hillstoke, the tide began to run in Severne's favour with great rapidity.

A letter came from the detective. Severne received it at breakfast, and laid it before Zoe, which had a favourable effect on her mind to begin.

Poikilus reported that the money was in good hands. He had seen the lady. She made no secret of the thing: the sum was £4900, and she said half belonged to her and half to a gentleman. She did not know him, but her agent, Ashmead, did. Poikilus added that he had asked her would she honour that gentleman's draft? She had replied she should be afraid to do that; but Mr. Ashmead should hand it to him on demand. Poikilus summed up that the lady was evidently respectable, and the whole thing square.

Severne posted this letter to his cousin, under cover, to show him he was really going to clear his estate; but begged him to return it immediately, and lend him £50. The accommodating cousin sent him £50, to aid him in wooing his heiress. He bought her a hoop-ring, apologised for its small value, and expressed his regret that all he could offer her was on a small scale, except his love.

She blushed, and smiled on him, like heaven opening. "Small and great, I take them," said she, and her lovely head rested on his shoulder.

They were engaged.

From that hour he could command a *tête-à-tête* with her whenever he chose, and his infernal passion began to suggest all manner of wild, wicked, and unreasonable hopes.

Meantime there was no stopping. He soon found he must speak seriously to Vizard. He went into his study, and began to open the subject. Vizard stopped him. "Fetch the other culprit," said he; and when Zoe came, blushing, he said, "Now I am going to make shorter work of this than you have done. Zoe has £10,000. What have you got?"

"Only a small estate, worth £8000, that I hope to clear of all encumbrances, if I can get my money."

"Fond of each other?—Well, don't strike me dead with your eyes. I have watched you, and, I own, a prettier pair of turtle-doves I never saw. Well, you have got love, and I have got money. I'll take care of you both. But you must live with me. I promise never to marry."

This brought Zoe round his neck, with tears and kisses of pure affection. He returned them and parted her hair paternally.

"This is a beautiful world, isn't it?" said he, with more tenderness than cynicism this time.

"Ah, that it is!" cried Zoe earnestly. "But I can't have you say you will never be as happy as I am. There are true hearts in this heavenly world; for I have found one."

"I have not, and don't mean to try again. I am going in for the paternal now. You two are my children. I have a talisman to keep me from marrying. I'll show it you." He drew a photograph from his drawer, set round with gold and pearls. He showed it them suddenly. They both started. A fine photograph of Ina Klosking. She was dressed as plainly as at the gambling-table; but without a bonnet, and only one rose in her hair. Her noble forehead was shown, and her face a model of intelligence, womanliness, and serene dignity.

He gazed at it, and they at him and it.

He kissed it. "Here is my Fate," said he. "Now mark the ingenuity of a parent. I keep out of my Fate's way. But I use her to keep off any other little Fates that may be about. No other humbug can ever catch me while I have such a noble humbug as this to contemplate. Ah! and here she is as Siebel. What a goddess! just look at her! Adorable! There, this shall stand upon my table, and the other shall be hung in my bedroom. Then, my dear Zoe, you will be safe from a step-mother, for I am your father now. Please understand that.

This brought poor Zoe round his neck again with such an

effusion, that at last he handed her to Severne, and he led her from the room, quite overcome, and to avoid all conversation about what had just passed, gave her over to Fanny, whilst he retired to compose himself.

By dinner-time he was as happy as a prince again, and relieved of all compunction.

He heard afterwards, from Fanny, that Zoe and she had discussed the incident, and Vizard's infatuation, Fanny being especially wroth at Vizard's abuse of pearls; but she told him she had advised Zoe not to mention that lady's name, but let her die out.

And in point of fact, Zoe did avoid the subject.

There came an eventful day. Vizard got a letter at breakfast from his bankers that made him stare and then knit his brows. It was about Edward Severne's acceptances. He said nothing, but ordered his horse, and rode into Taddington.

The day was keen but sunny; and, seeing him afoot so early, Zoe said she should like a drive before luncheon. She would show Severne and Fanny some ruins on Pagnell Hill. They could leave the trap at the village inn, and walk up the hill. Fanny begged off, and Severne was very glad. The prospect of a long walk up a hill with Zoe, and then a day spent in utter seclusion with her, fired his imagination and made his heart beat. Here was one of the opportunities he had long sighed for of making passionate love to innocence and inexperience.

Zoe herself was eager for the drive, and came down, followed by Rosa with some wraps, and waited in the morning-room for the dog-cart. It was behind time for once, because the careful coachman had insisted on the axle being oiled. At last the sound of wheels was heard. A carriage drew up at the door.

"Tell Mr. Severne," said Zoe. "He is in the dining-room, I think."

But it was not the dog-cart.

A vigilant footman came hastily out and opened the hall-door. A lady was on the steps and spoke to him, but in speaking she caught sight of Zoe in the hall. She instantly slipped past the man and stood within the great door.

"Miss Vizard?" said she.

Zoe took a step towards her and said, with astonishment, "Mademoiselle Klosking!"

The ladies looked at each other; and Zoe saw something

strange was coming, for the Klosking was very pale, yet firm, and fixed her eyes upon her as if there was nothing else in sight.

"You have a visitor—Mr. Severne?"

"Yes," said Zoe, drawing up.

"Can I speak with him?"

"He will answer for himself. EDWARD!"

At her call Severne came out hastily behind Ina Klosking. She turned, and they faced each other.

"Ah!" she cried; and in spite of all there was more of joy than any other passion in the exclamation.

Not so he. He uttered a scream of dismay, and staggered, white as a ghost, but still glared at Ina Klosking.

Zoe's voice fell on him like a clap of thunder: "What!—Edward!—Mr. Severne—has this lady still any right——"

"No, none whatever!" he cried; "it is all past and gone."

"What is past?" said Ina Klosking grandly. "Are you out of your senses?"

Then she was close to him in a moment, by one grand movement, and took him by both lappels of his coat, and held him firmly. "Speak before this lady," she cried. "Have—I—no—rights—over you?" and her voice was majestic, and her Danish eyes gleamed lightning.

The wretch's knees gave way a moment, and he shook in her hands. Then suddenly he turned wild. "Fiend! you have ruined me!" he yelled; and then, with his natural strength, which was great, and the superhuman power of mad excitement, he whirled her right round, and flung her from him, and dashed out of the door, uttering cries of rage and despair.

The unfortunate lady, thus taken by surprise, fell heavily, and by cruel ill-luck struck her temple, in falling, against the sharp corner of a marble table. It gashed her forehead fearfully, and she lay senseless, with the blood spurting in jets from her white temple.

Zoe screamed violently; and the hall and the hall-staircase seemed to fill by magic.

In the terror and confusion Harrington Vizard strode into the hall from Taddington. "What is the matter?" he cried; "a woman killed?"

Some one cried out she had fallen.

"Water, fools! a sponge! don't stand gaping!" and he flung himself on his knees, and raised the woman's head from the floor. One eager look into her white face—one wild cry —"Great God!—it is——" He had recognised her.

CHAPTER XXII

It was piteous to see and hear. The blood would not stop; it spurted no longer, but it flowed alarmingly. Vizard sent Harris off in his own fly for a doctor, to save time. He called for ice. He cried out in agony to his servants, "Can none of you think of anything? There—that hat. Here, you women! tear me the nap off with your fingers. My God!—what is to be done? She'll bleed to death." And he held her to his breast, and almost moaned with pity over her, as he pressed the cold sponge to her wound—in vain; for still the red blood would flow.

Wheels ground the gravel. Servants flew to the door, crying, "The doctor! the doctor!"

As if he could have been fetched in five minutes from three miles off.

Yet it was a doctor. Harris had met Miss Gale walking quietly down from Hillstoke. He had told her in a few hurried words, and brought her as fast as the horses could go.

She glided in swiftly, keen, but self-possessed, and took it all in directly.

Vizard saw her and cried, "Ah! help!—she is bleeding to death!"

"She shall not," said Rhoda. Then to one footman, "Bring a footstool *you;*" to another, "*You* bring me a cork;" to Vizard, "*You* hold her towards me so. Now sponge the wound."

This done, she pinched the lips of the wound together with her neat strong fingers. "See what I do," she said to Vizard. "You will have to do it whilst I——ah, the stool! Now lay her head on that; the other side, man. Now, sir, compress the wound as I did, vigorously. Hold the cork, *you,* till I want it."

She took out of her pocket some adhesive plaster, and flakes of some strong styptic, and a piece of elastic. "Now," said she to Vizard, "give me a little opening in the middle to plaster these strips across the wound." He did so. Then in a moment she passed the elastic under the sufferer's head, drew it over with the styptic between her finger and thumb, and crack! the styptic was tight on the compressed wound; she forced in more styptic, increasing the pressure, then she

whipped out a sort of surgical house-wife, and with some cutting instrument reduced the cork, then cut it convex, and fastened it on the styptic by another elastic. There was no flutter, yet it was all done in fifty seconds.

"There," said she, "she will bleed no more, to speak of. Now seat her upright—— Why! I have seen her before. This is—— Sir, you can send the men away."

"Yes; and Harris, pack up Mr. Severne's things, and bring them down here this moment."

The male servants retired, the women held aloof. Fanny Dover came forward, pale and trembling, and helped to place Ina Klosking in the hall porter's chair. She was insensible still, but moaned faintly.

Her moans were echoed: all eyes turned. It was Zoe, seated apart, all bowed and broken—ghastly pale, and glaring straight before her.

"Poor girl!" said Vizard. "We forgot her. It is her heart that bleeds. Where is the scoundrel, that I may kill him?" and he rushed out at the door to look for him. The man's life would not have been worth much if Squire Vizard could have found him then.

But he soon came back to his wretched home, and eyed the dismal scene, and the havoc one man had made: the marble floor all stained with blood—Ina Klosking supported in a chair, white, and faintly moaning—Zoe still crushed and glaring at vacancy, and Fanny sobbing round her with pity and terror; for she knew there must be worse to come than this wild stupor.

"Take her to her room, Fanny dear," said Vizard, in a hurried, faltering voice; "and don't leave her. Rosa, help Miss Dover. Do not leave her alone, night nor day." Then to Miss Gale, "She will live? Tell me she will live."

"I hope so," said Rhoda Gale. "Oh, the blow will not kill her; nor yet the loss of blood. But I fear there will be distress of mind added to the bodily shock. And such a noble face! My own heart bleeds for her. Oh, sir! do not send her away to strangers. Let me take her up to the farm. It is nursing she will need, and tact, when she comes to herself."

"Send her away to strangers!" cried Vizard. "Never! No—not even to the farm. Here she received her wound; here all that you and I can do shall be done to save her. Ah, here's Harris with the villain's things. Get the lady's boxes out, and put Mr. Severne's into the fly. Give the

man two guineas, and let him leave them at the 'Swan,' in Taddington."

He then beckoned down the women, and had Ina Klosking carried upstairs to the very room Severne had occupied.

He then convened the servants, and placed them formally under Miss Gale's orders; and one female servant having made a remark, he turned her out of the house neck and crop directly with her month's wages. The others had to help her pack, only half-an-hour being allowed for her exit.

The house seemed all changed. Could this be Vizard Court? Dead gloom—hurried whispers—and everybody walking softly, and scared—none knowing what might be the next calamity.

Vizard felt sick at heart and helpless. He had done all he could, and was reduced to that condition women bear far better than men—he must wait, and hope, and fear. He walked up and down the carpeted landing, racked with anxiety.

At last there came a single scream of agony from Ina Klosking's room.

It made the strong man quake.

He tapped softly at the door.

Rhoda opened it.

"What is it?" he faltered.

She replied gravely, "Only what must be. She is beginning to realise what has befallen her. Don't come here; you can do no good. I will run down to you whenever I dare. Give me a nurse to help, this first night."

He went down and sent into the village for a woman who bore a great name for nursing. Then he wandered about, disconsolate.

The leaden hours passed. He went to dress, and discovered Ina Klosking's blood upon his clothes. It shocked him first, and then it melted him: he felt an inexpressible tenderness at sight of it. The blood that had flowed in her veins seemed sacred to him. He folded that suit, and tied it up in a silk handkerchief, and locked it away.

In due course he sat down to dinner; we are all such creatures of habit. There was everything as usual, except the familiar faces. There was the glittering plate on the polished sideboard, the pyramid of flowers surrounded with fruits. There were even chairs at the table, for the servants did not know he was to be quite alone. But he was. One delicate dish after another was brought him, and sent away untasted.

Soon after dinner Rhoda Gale came down and told him her patient was in a precarious condition; and she feared fever and delirium. She begged him to send one servant up to the farm for certain medicaments she had there, and another to the chemist at Taddington. These were despatched on swift horses; and both were back in half-an-hour.

By-and-by Fanny Dover came down to him with red eyes, and brought him Zoe's love. "But," said she, "don't ask her to come down. She is ashamed to look anybody in the face, poor girl."

"Why? what has *she* done?"

"Oh, Harrington, she has made no secret of her affection: and now, at sight of that woman, he has abandoned her."

"Tell her I love her more than I ever did; and respect her more. Where is her pride?"

"Pride! she is full of it; and it will help her—by-and-by. But she has a bitter time to go through first. You don't know how she loves him."

"What! love him still, after what he has done?"

"Yes. She interprets it this way and that. She cannot bear to believe another woman has any real right to separate them."

"Separate them! The scoundrel knocked *her* down for loving him still, and fled from them both. Was ever guilt more clear? If she doubts that he is a villain, tell her from me that he is a forger, and has given me bills with false names on them. The bankers gave me notice to-day, and I was coming home to order him out of the house when this miserable business happened."

"A forger! is it possible?" said Fanny. "But it is no use my telling her that sort of thing. If he had committed murder, and was true to her, she would cling to him. She never knew till now how she loved him, nor I either. She put him in Coventry for telling a lie; but she was far more unhappy all the time than he was. There is nothing to do but to be kind to her, and let her hide her face. Don't hurry her."

"Not I. God help her! If she has a wish it shall be gratified. I am powerless. She is young. Surely time will cure her of a villain, now he is detected."

Fanny said she hoped so.

The truth is, Zoe had not opened her heart to Fanny: she clung to her and writhed in her arms; but she spoke

little; and one broken sentence contradicted the other. But mental agony, like bodily, finds its vent, not in speech, the brain's great interpreter, but in inarticulate cries, and moans, and sighs, that prove us animals even in the throes of mind. Zoe was in that cruel state of suffering.

So passed that miserable day.

CHAPTER XXIII

Ina Klosking recovered her senses that evening, and asked Miss Gale where she was. Miss Gale told her she was in the house of a friend.

"What friend?"

"That," said Miss Gale, "I will tell you by-and-by. You are in good hands, and I am your physician."

"I have heard your voice before," said Ina; "but I know not where; and it is so dark. Why is it so dark?"

"Because too much light is not good for you. You have met with an accident."

"What accident, madam?"

"You fell and hurt your poor forehead. See, I have bandaged it, and now you must let me wet the bandage—to keep your brow cool."

"Thank you, madam," said Ina, in her own sweet but queenly way; "you are very good to me. I wish I could see your face more clearly. I know your voice." Then after a silence, during which Miss Gale eyed her with anxiety, she said, like one groping her way to the truth, "I—fell—and—hurt—my—forehead?—*Ah!*"

Then it was she uttered the cry that made Vizard quake at the door, and shook, for a moment, even Rhoda's nerves, though, as a rule, they were iron in a situation of this kind.

It had all come back to Ina Klosking.

After that piteous cry she never said a word. She did nothing but think, and put her hand to her head.

And soon after midnight she began to talk incoherently.

The physician could only proceed by physical means. She attacked the coming fever at once, with the remedies of the day, and also with an infusion of monk's-hood. That poison, promptly administered, did not deceive her. She

obtained a slight perspiration, which was so much gained in the battle.

In the morning she got the patient shifted into another bed, and she slept a little after that. But soon she was awake, restless, and raving: still her character pervaded her delirium. No violence. Nothing any sore-injured woman need be ashamed to have said: only it was all disconnected. One moment she was speaking to the leader of the orchestra —at another to Mr. Ashmead — at another, with divine tenderness, to her still faithful Severne. And though not hurried, as usual in these cases, it was almost incessant and pitiable to hear, each observation was so wise and good, yet, all being disconnected, the hearer could not but feel that a noble mind lay before him, overthrown and broken into fragments like some Attic column.

In the middle of this the handle was softly turned, and Zoe Vizard came in pale and sombre.

Long before this, she had said to Fanny, several times, "I ought to go and see her;" and Fanny had said, "Of course you ought."

So now she came. She folded her arms, and stood at the foot of the bed, and looked at her unhappy rival, unhappy as possible herself.

What contrary feelings fought in that young breast! Pity and hatred. She must hate the rival who had come between her and him she loved; she must pity the woman who lay there, pale, wounded, and little likely to recover.

And with all this, a great desire to know whether this sufferer had any right to come and seize Edward Severne by the arm, and so draw down calamity on both the women who loved him.

She looked and listened, and Rhoda Gale thought it hard upon her patient.

But it was not in human nature the girl should do otherwise: so Rhoda said nothing.

What fell from Ina's lips was not of a kind to make Zoe more her friend.

Her mind seemed now like a bird tied by a long silken thread. It made large excursions, but constantly came back to her love. Sometimes that love was happy, sometimes unhappy. Often she said "Edward," in the exquisite tone of a loving woman; and whenever she did Zoe received it with a sort of shiver, as if a dagger, fine as a needle, had passed through her whole body.

At last, after telling some tenor that he had sung F natural instead of F sharp, and praised somebody's rendering of a song in *Il flauto magico,* and told Ashmead to make no more engagements for her at present, for she was going to Vizard Court, the poor soul paused a minute and uttered a deep moan.

"*Struck down by the very hand that was vowed to protect me!*" said she. Then was silent again. Then began to cry, and sob, and wring her hands.

Zoe put her hand to her heart and moved feebly towards the door. However, she stopped a moment to say, "I am no use here. You would soon have me raving in the next bed. I will send Fanny." Then she drew herself up. "Miss Gale, everybody here is at your command. Pray spare nothing you can think of to save—*my brother's guest.*"

There came out the bitter drop.

When she had said that, she stalked from the room like some red Indian bearing a mortal arrow in him, but too proud to show it.

But when she got to her own room, she flung herself on her sofa, and writhed and sobbed in agony.

Fanny Dover came in and found her so, and flew to her.

But she ordered her out quite wildly. "No, no; go to *her,* like all the rest, and leave poor Zoe all alone. She *is* alone."

Then Fanny clung to her, and tried hard to comfort her.

This young lady now became very zealous and active. She divided her time between the two sufferers, and was indefatigable in their service. When she was not supporting Zoe, she was always at Miss Gale's elbow offering her services. "Do let me help you," she said; "do pray let me help. We are poor at home, and there is nothing I cannot do. I'm worth any three servants."

She always helped shift the patient into a fresh bed, and that was done very often. She would run to the cook or the butler for anything that was wanted in a hurry. She flung gentility and humbug to the winds. Then she dressed in ten minutes, and went and dined with Vizard, and made excuses for Zoe's absence, to keep everything smooth: and finally, she insisted on sitting up with Ina Klosking till three in the morning, and made Miss Gale go to bed in the room. "Paid nurses!" said she; "they are no use except to snore, and drink the patient's wine.

You and I will watch her every moment of the night! and if I'm ever at a loss what to do, I will call you."

Miss Gale stared at her once, and then accepted this new phase of her character.

The fever was hot while it lasted; but it was so encountered with tonics, and port wine, and strong beef-soup —not your rubbishy beef-tea—that in forty-eight hours it began to abate. Ina recognised Rhoda Gale as the lady who had saved Severne's life at Montpelier, and wept long and silently upon her neck. In due course Zoe, hearing there was a great change, came in again to look at her. She stood and eyed her. Soon Ina Klosking caught sight of her, and stared at her.

"You here!" said she. "Ah! you are Miss Vizard. I am in your house. I will get up and leave it;" and she made a feeble attempt to rise, but fell back, and the tears welled out of her eyes at her helplessness.

Zoe was indignant, but for the moment more shocked than anything else. She moved away a little, and did not know what to say.

"Let me look at you," said the patient. "Ah! you are beautiful. When I saw you at the theatre you fascinated me; how much more a man? I will resist no more. You are too beautiful to be resisted. Take him, and let me die."

"I do her no good," said Zoe, half sullenly, half trembling.

"Indeed you do not," said Rhoda bluntly, and almost bitterly. She was all nurse.

"I'll come here no more," said Zoe sadly, but sternly, and left the room.

Then Ina turned to Miss Gale and said patiently, "I hope I was not rude to that lady—who has broken my heart."

Fanny and Rhoda took each a hand, and told her she could not be rude to anybody.

"My friends," said Ina, looking piteously to each in turn, "it is her house, you know, and she is very good to me now —after breaking my heart."

Then Fanny showed a deal of tact. "*Her* house!" said she; "it is no more hers than mine. Why, this house belongs to a gentleman, and he is mad after music. He knows you very well, though you don't know him, and he thinks you the first singer in Europe."

"You flatter me," said Ina sadly.

"Well, he thinks so; and he is reckoned a very good judge. Ah! now I think of it, I will show you something, and then you will believe me."

She ran off to the library, snatched up Ina's picture, set round with pearls, and came panting in with it. "There," said she; "now, you look at that!" and she put it before her eyes. "Now, who is that, if you please?"

"Oh! it is Ina Klosking that was. Please bring me a glass."

The two ladies looked at each other. Miss Gale made a negative signal, and Fanny said, "By-and-by. This will do instead, for it is as like as two peas. Now, ask yourself how this comes to be in the house, and set in pearls. Why, they are worth three hundred pounds. I assure you that the master of this house is *fanatico per la musica;* heard you sing Siebel at Homburg—raved about you—wanted to call on you; we had to drag him away from the place; and he declares you are the first singer in the world; and you cannot doubt his sincerity, for *here are the pearls.*"

Ina Klosking's pale cheek coloured, and then she opened her two arms wide, and put them round Fanny's neck and kissed her. Her innocent vanity was gratified, and her gracious nature suggested gratitude to her, who had brought her the compliment, instead of the usual ungrateful bumptiousness praise elicits from vanity.

Then Miss Gale put in her word—"When you met with this unfortunate accident, I was for taking you up to my house. It is three miles off; but he would not hear of it. He said, 'No; here she got her wound, and here she must be cured.'"

"So," said Fanny, "pray set your mind at ease. My cousin Harrington is a very good soul, but rather arbitrary. If you want to leave this place, you must get thoroughly well and strong; for he will never let you go till you are."

Between these two ladies, clever and co-operating, Ina smiled, and seemed relieved; but she was too weak to converse any more just then.

Some hours afterwards she beckoned Fanny to her and said, "The master of the house—what is his name?"

"Harrington Vizard."

"What!—*her* father!"

"La, no; only her half-brother."

"If he is so kind to me because I sing, why comes he not to see me? *She* has come."

Fanny smiled. "It is plain you are not an English-woman, though you speak it so beautifully. An English gentleman does not intrude into a lady's room."

"It is his room."

"He would say that whilst you occupy it, it is yours, and not his."

"He awaits my invitation then?"

"I daresay he would come if you were to invite him, but certainly not without."

"I wish to see him who has been so kind to me, and so loves music; but not to-day—I feel unable."

The next day she asked for a glass, and was distressed at her appearance. She begged for a cap.

"What kind of cap?" asked Fanny.

"One like that," said she, pointing to a portrait on the wall. It was of a lady in a plain brown silk dress, and a little white shawl, and a neat cap with a narrow lace border all round her face.

This particular cap was out of date full sixty years; but the house had a store-room of relics, and Fanny, with Vizard's help, soon rummaged out a cap of the sort, with a narrow frill all round.

Her hair was smoothed, a white silk band passed over the now closed wound, and the cap fitted on her. She looked pale but angelic.

Fanny went down to Vizard, and invited him to come and see Mademoiselle Klosking—by her desire. "But," she added, "Miss Gale is very anxious, lest you should get talking of Severne. She says the fever and loss of blood have weakened her terribly: and if we bring the fever on again, she cannot answer for her life."

"Has she spoken of him to you?"

"Not once."

"Then why should she to me?"

"Because you are a man, and she may think to get the *truth* out of you; she knows *we* shall only say what is for the best. She is very deep, and we don't know her mind yet."

Vizard said he would be as guarded as he could; but if they saw him going wrong, they must send him away.

"Oh, Miss Gale will do that, you may be sure," said Fanny.

Thus prepared, Vizard followed Fanny up the stairs to the sick-room.

Either there is such a thing as love at first sight, or it is something more than first sight, when an observant man gazes at a woman for an hour in a blaze of light, and drinks in her looks, her walk, her voice, and all the outward signs of a beautiful soul; for the stout cynic's heart beat at entering that room as it had not beat for years. To be sure he had not only seen her on the stage in all her glory, but had held her, pale and bleeding, to his manly breast, and his heart warmed to her all the more, and, indeed, fairly melted with tenderness.

Fanny went in and announced him. He followed softly, and looked at her.

Wealth can make even a sick-room pretty.

The Klosking lay on snowy pillows whose glossy damask was edged with lace, and upon her form was an eider-down quilt covered with violet-coloured satin, and her face was set in that sweet cap which hid her wound, and made her eloquent face less ghastly.

She turned to look at him, and he gazed at her in a way that spoke volumes.

"A seat," said she softly.

Fanny was for putting one close to her.

"No," said Miss Gale, "lower down: then she need not turn her head."

So he sat down, nearer her feet.

"My good host," said she, in her mellow voice, that retained its quality but not its power, "I desire to thank you for your goodness to a poor singer, struck down—by the hand that was bound to protect her."

Vizard faltered out that there was nothing to thank him for. He was proud to have her under his roof, though deeply grieved at the cause.

She looked at him, and her two nurses looked at her, and at each other, as much as to say, "She is going upon dangerous ground."

They were right. But she had not the courage; or, perhaps—as most women are a little cat-like in this, that they go away once or twice from the subject nearest their heart, before they turn and pounce on it—she must speak of other things first. Said she, "But if I was unfortunate in that, I was fortunate in this, that I fell into good hands. These ladies are sisters to me," and she gave Miss Gale her hand; and kissed the other hand to Fanny, though she could scarcely lift it: "and I have a host who loves

music, and overrates my poor ability." Then, after a pause, "What have you heard me sing?"

"Siebel."

"Only Siebel! why, that is a poor little thing."

"So *I* thought, till I heard you sing it."

"And, after Siebel, you bought my photograph."

"Instantly."

"And wasted pearls on it."

"No, madam; I wasted it on pearls."

"If I were well, I should call that extravagant. But it is permitted to flatter the sick. It is kind. Me you overrate, I fear; but you do well to honour music. Ay, I, who lie here wounded, and broken-hearted, do thank God for music. Our bodies are soon crushed; our loves decay, or turn to hate; but art is immortal."

She could no longer roll this out in her grand contralto; but she could still raise her eyes with enthusiasm, and her pale face was illuminated. A grand soul shone through her, though she was pale, weak, and prostrate.

They admired her in silence.

After a while she resumed, and said, "If I live, I must live for my art alone."

Miss Gale saw her approaching a dangerous topic; so she said hastily, "Don't say *if* you live, please, because that is arranged. You have been out of danger this twenty-four hours, provided you do not relapse; and I must take care of that."

"My kind friend," said Ina, "I shall not relapse; only my weakness is pitiable. Sometimes I can scarcely forbear crying, I feel so weak. When shall I be stronger?"

"You shall be a little stronger every three days. There are always ups and downs in convalescence."

"When shall I be strong enough to move?"

"Let me answer that question," said Vizard. "When you are strong enough to sing us Siebel's great song."

"There," said Fanny Dover; "there is a mercenary host for you. He means to have a song out of you. Till then you are his prisoner."

"No, no, she is mine," said Miss Gale; "and she shan't go till she has sung me 'Hail, Columbia!' None of your Italian trash for me."

Ina smiled, and said it was a fair condition, provided that "Hail, Columbia," with which composition unfortunately she was unacquainted, was not beyond her powers. "I have

often sung for money," said she, "but this time"—here she opened her grand arms, and took Rhoda Gale to her bosom —"I shall sing for love."

"Now we have settled that," said Vizard, "my mind is more at ease, and I will retire."

"One moment," said Ina, turning to him. Then, in a low and very meaning voice, "*There is something else.*"

"No doubt there is plenty," said Miss Gale sharply: "and by my authority, I postpone it all till you are stronger. Bid us good-bye for the present, Mr. Vizard."

"I obey," said he. "But, madam, please remember I am always at your service. Send for me when you please, and the oftener the better for me."

"Thank you, my kind host. Oblige me with your hand."

He gave her his hand. She took it, and put her lips to it with pure and gentle and seemly gratitude, and with no loss of dignity, though the act was humble.

He turned his head away to hide the emotion that act and the touch of her sweet lips caused him; Miss Gale hurried him out of the room.

"You naughty patient," said she, "you must do nothing to excite yourself."

"Sweet physician, loving nurse, I am not excited."

Miss Gale felt her heart to see.

"Gratitude does not excite," said Ina. "It is too tame a feeling in the best of us."

"That is a fact," said Miss Gale: "so let us all be grateful and avoid exciting topics. Think what *I* should feel if you had a relapse. Why, you would break my heart."

"Should I?"

"I really think you would, tough as it is. One gets so fond of an unselfish patient. You cannot think how rare they are, dear. You are a pearl. I cannot afford to lose you."

"Then you shall not," said Ina firmly. "Know that I, who seem so weak, am a woman of great resolution. I will follow good counsel; I will postpone all dangerous topics till I am stronger: I will live. For I will not grieve the true friends calamity has raised me."

Of course Fanny told Zoe all about this interview. She listened gloomily; and all she said was, "Sisters do not go for much, when a man is in love."

"Do brothers, when a woman is?" said Fanny.

"I daresay they go for as much as they are worth."

"Zoe, that is not fair. Harrington is full of affection for you; but you will not go near him. Any other man would be very angry. Do pray make an effort and come down to dinner to-day."

"No, no; he has you, and his Klosking; and I have my broken heart. I *am* alone; and so I will be all alone."

She cried and sobbed, but she was obstinate, and Fanny could only let her have her own way in that.

Another question was soon disposed of. When Fanny invited her into the sick-room, she said haughtily, "I go there no more. Cure her, and send her away—if Harrington will let her go. I daresay she is to be pitied."

"Of course she is. She is your fellow-victim, if you would only let yourself see it."

"Unfortunately, instead of pitying her, I hate her. She has destroyed my happiness, and done herself no good. He does not love her, and never will."

Fanny found herself getting angry, so she said no more; for she was determined nothing should make her quarrel with poor Zoe. But after dinner, being *tête-à-tête* with Vizard, she told him she was afraid Zoe could not see things as they were; and she asked him if he had any idea what had become of Severne.

"Fled the country, I suppose."

"Are you sure he is not lurking about?"

"What for?"

"To get a word with Zoe—alone."

"He will not come near this. I will break every bone in his skin if he does."

"But he is so sly; he might hang about."

"What for? She never goes out; and if she did, have you so poor an opinion of her as to think she would speak to him?"

"Oh, no; and she would forbid him to speak to her. But he would be sure to persist, and he has such wonderful powers of explanation, and she is blinded by love: I think he would make her believe black was white, if he had a chance; and if he is about he will get a chance some day. She is doing the very worst thing she could—shutting herself up so. Any moment she will turn wild, and rush out reckless. She is in a dangerous state, you mark my words: she is broken-hearted, and yet she is bitter against everybody, except that young

villain, and he is the only enemy she has in the world. I don't believe Mademoiselle Klosking ever wronged her, nor never will. Appearances are against her; but she is a good woman, or I am a fool. Take my advice, Harrington, and be on your guard. If he had written a penitent letter to Mademoiselle Klosking, that would be a different thing; but he ignores her, and that frightens me for Zoe."

Harrington would not admit that Zoe needed any other safeguard against a detected scoundrel than her own sense of dignity. He consented, however, to take precautions, if Fanny would solemnly promise not to tell Zoe, and so wound her. On that condition, he would see his head-keeper to-morrow, and all the keepers and watchers should be posted so as to encircle the parish with vigilance. He assured Fanny these fellows had a whole system of signals to the ear and eye, and Severne could not get within a mile of the house undetected. "But," said he, "I will not trust to that alone. I will send an advertisement to the local papers and the leading London journals, so worded, that the scoundrel shall know his forgery is detected, and that he will be arrested on a magistrate's warrant if he sets foot in Barfordshire."

Fanny said that was capital, and altogether he had set her mind at rest.

"Then do as much for me," said Vizard. "Please explain a remarkable phenomenon. You were always a bright girl, and no fool; but not exactly what humdrum people would call a good girl. You are not offended?"

"The idea! Why, I have publicly disowned goodness again and again. You have heard me."

"So I have, but was not that rather deceitful of you? for you have turned out as good as gold. Anxiety has kept me at home of late, and I have watched you. You live for others; you are all over the house to serve two suffering *women*. That is real charity, not sexual charity, which humbugs the world, but not me. You are cook, housemaid, butler, nurse, and friend to both of them. In an interval of your time so creditably employed, you come and cheer me up with your bright little face, and give me wise advice. I know that women are all humbugs; only you are a humbug reversed, and deserve a statue—and trimmings. You have been passing yourself off for a naughty girl, and all the time you were an extra good one."

"And that puzzles the woman-hater, the cynical student,

who says he has fathomed woman. My poor dear Harrington, if you cannot read so shallow a character as I am, how will you get on with those ladies upstairs,—Zoe, who is as deep as the sea, and turbid with passion—and the Klosking, who is as deep as the ocean?"

She thought a moment, and said, "There, I will have pity on you. You shall understand one woman before you die, and that is me; I'll give you the clue to my seeming inconsistencies—if *you* will give *me* a cigarette."

"What, another hidden virtue! You smoke?"

"Not I, except when I happen to be with a noble soul who won't tell."

Vizard found her a Russian cigarette, and lighted his own cigar, and she lectured as follows:—

"What women love and can't do without, if they are young, and healthy, and spirited, is—Excitement. I am one who pines for it. Now society is so constructed that, to get excitement you must be naughty. Waltzing all night, and flirting all day, are excitement. Crochet, and church, and examining girls in St. Matthew, and dining *en famille*, and going to bed at ten, are stagnation. Good girls—that means stagnant girls; I hate and despise the tame little wretches, and I never was one and never will be. But now look here: we have two ladies in love with one villain—that is exciting. One gets nearly killed in the house—that is gloriously exciting; the other is broken-hearted. If I were to be a bad girl and say, 'It is not my business; I will leave them to themselves, and go my little mill round of selfishness as before,'—why, what a fool I must be! I should lose Excitement. Instead of that, I run and get things for the Klosking—Excitement. I cook for her, and nurse her, and sit up half the night—Excitement. Then I run to Zoe and do my best for her, and get snubbed—Excitement. Then I sit at the head of your table and order you—Excitement. Oh, it is lovely!"

"Shall you not be sorry when they both get well, and Routine recommences?"

"Of course I shall: that is the sort of good girl I am. And oh, when that fatal day comes, how I shall flirt! Heaven help my next flirtee! I shall soon flirt out the stigma of a good girl. You mark my words, I shall flirt with some *married man* after this. I never did that yet. But I shall; I know I shall,—Ah!—there, I have burnt my finger."

"Never mind; that is exciting."

"As such I accept it. Good-bye. I must go and relieve Miss Gale. Exit the good girl on her mission of charity; ha! ha! ha!" She hummed a *valse à deux temps,* and went dancing out with such a whirl, that her petticoats, which were ample, and not as now, like a sack tied at the knees, made quite a cool air in the room.

She had not been gone long when Miss Gale came down, full of her patient. She wanted to get her out of bed during the daytime; but said she was not strong enough to sit up. Would he order an invalid couch down from London? She described the article, and where it was to be had.

He said Harris should go up in the morning and bring one down with him.

He then put her several questions about her patient; and at last asked her, with an anxiety he in vain endeavoured to conceal, what she thought was the relation between her and Severne.

Now it may be remembered that Miss Gale had once been on the point of telling him all she knew, and had written him a letter. But, at that time, the Klosking was not expected to appear on the scene in person. Were she now to say she had seen her and Severne living together, Rhoda felt that she should lower her patient. She had not the heart to do that.

Rhoda Gale was not of an amorous temperament, and she was all the more open to female attachments. With a little encouragement she would have loved Zoe, but she had now transferred her affection to the Klosking. She replied to Vizard, almost like a male lover defending the object of his affection.

"The exact relation is more than I can tell; but I think he has lived upon her, for she was richer than he was; and I feel sure he has promised her marriage. And my great fear now is lest he should get hold of her and keep his promise. He is as poor as a rat, or a female physician: and she has a fortune in her voice, and has money besides, Miss Dover tells me. Pray keep her here till she is quite well, please."

"I will."

"And then let me have her up at Hillstoke. She is beginning to love me, and I dote on her."

"So do I."

"Ah, but you must not."

"Why not?"

"Because——"

"Well, why not?"

"She is not to love any man again, who will not marry her. I won't let her. I'll kill her first, I love her so. A rogue she shan't marry, and I can't let you marry her, because her connection with that Severne is mysterious. She seems the soul of virtue, but I could not let *you* marry her until things are clearer."

"Make your mind easy. I will not marry her—nor anybody else—till things are a great deal clearer than I have ever found them, where your sex is concerned."

Miss Gale approved the resolution.

Next day, Vizard posted his keepers, and sent his advertisements to the London and country journals.

Fanny came into his study to tell him there was more trouble—Miss Maitland taken seriously ill, and had written to Zoe.

"Poor old soul!" said Vizard. "I have a great mind to ride over and see her."

"Somebody ought to go," said Fanny.

"Well, you go."

"How can I—with Zoe, and Mademoiselle Klosking, and you, to look after?"

"Instead of one old woman. Not much excitement in that."

"No, cousin. To think of your remembering! Why, you must have gone to bed sober."

"I often do."

"You were always an eccentric landowner."

"Don't you talk. You are a caricature."

This banter was interrupted by Miss Gale, who came to tell Harrington Mademoiselle Klosking desired to see him, at his leisure.

He said he would come directly.

"Before you go," said Miss Gale, "let us come to an understanding. She had only two days' fever; but that fever, and the loss of blood, and the shock to her nerves, brought her to death's door by exhaustion. Now she is slowly recovering her strength, because she has a healthy stomach, and I give her no stimulants to spur and then weaken her, but choice and simple esculents, the effect of which I watch, and vary them accordingly. But the convalescent period is always one of danger, especially from chills to the body and excitements to the brain. At no period are more patients thrown away,

for want of vigilance. Now I can guard against chills and other bodily things, but not against excitements—unless you co-operate. The fact is, we must agree to avoid speaking about Mr. Severne. We must be on our guard. We must parry—we must evade—we must be deaf, stupid, slippery; but no Severne—for five or six days more, at all events."

Thus forewarned, Vizard in due course paid his second visit to Ina Klosking.

He found her propped up with pillows this time. She begged him to be seated.

She had evidently something on her mind, and her nurses watched her like cats.

"You are fond of music, sir?"

"Not of all music; I adore good music, I hate bad; and I despise mediocre. Silence is golden indeed, compared with poor music."

"You are right, sir. Have you good music in the house?"

"A little. I get all the operas, and you know there are generally one or two good things in an opera—amongst the rubbish. But the great bulk of our collection is rather old-fashioned. It is sacred music; oratorios, masses, anthems, services, chants. My mother was the collector. Her tastes were good but narrow. Do you care for that sort of music?"

"Sacred music? Why, it is, of all music, the most divine, and soothes the troubled soul. Can I not see the books? I read music like words. By reading I almost hear."

"We will bring you up a dozen books to begin on."

He went down directly; and such was his pleasure in doing anything for the Klosking, that he executed the order in person, brought up a little pile of folios and quartos, beautifully bound and lettered, a lady having been the collector.

Now, as he mounted the stairs, with his very chin upon the pile, who should he see looking over the rails at him but his sister Zoe.

She was sadly changed. There was a fixed ashen pallor on her cheek, and a dark circle under her eyes.

He stopped to look at her. "My poor child," said he, "you look very ill."

"I am very ill, dear."

"Would you not be better for a change?"

"I might."

"Why coop yourself up in your own room? Why deny yourself a brother's sympathy?"

The girl trembled and tears came to her eyes.

"Is it with me you sympathise?" said she.

"Can you doubt it, Zoe?"

Zoe hung her head a moment and did not reply. Then she made a diversion. "What are those books?—Oh, I see; your mother's music-books. Nothing is too good for *her*."

"Nothing in the way of music-books is too good for her. For shame!—are you jealous of that unfortunate lady?"

Zoe made no reply.

She put her hands before her face that Vizard might not see her mind.

Then he rested his books on a table, and came and took her head in his hands paternally. "Do not shut yourself up any longer. Solititude is dangerous to the afflicted. Be more with me than ever; and let this cruel blow bind us more closely, instead of disuniting us."

He kissed her lovingly; and his kind words set her tears flowing. But they did her little good. They were bitter tears. Between her and her brother there was now a barrier sisterly love could not pass. He hated and despised Edward Severne; and she only distrusted him, and feared he was a villain: she loved him still with every fibre of her heart, and pined for his explanation of all that seemed so dark.

So then he entered the sick-room with his music-books; and Zoe, after watching him in, without seeming to do so, crept away to her own room.

Then there was rather a pretty little scene. Miss Gale and Miss Dover, on each side of the bed, held a heavy music-book, and Mademoiselle Klosking turned the leaves and read, when the composition was worth reading. If it was not, she quietly passed it over, without any injurious comment.

Vizard watched her from the foot of the bed, and could tell in a moment by her face whether the composition was good, bad, or indifferent. When bad, her face seemed to turn impassive, like marble, when good, to expand; and when she lighted on a masterpiece, she was almost transfigured, and her face shone with elevated joy.

This was a study to the enamoured Vizard, and it did not escape the quick-sighted doctress. She despised music on its own merits, but she despised nothing that could be pressed into the service of medicine; and she said to herself, "I'll cure her with esculents and music."

The book was taken away to make room for another.

Then said Ina Klosking, "Mr. Vizard, I desire to say a word to you. Excuse me, my dear friends."

Miss Gale coloured up. She had not foreseen a *tête-à-tête* between Vizard and her patient. However, there was no help for it: and she withdrew to a little distance with Fanny; but she said to Vizard, openly and expressively, "Remember!"

When they had withdrawn a little way, Ina Klosking fixed her eyes on Vizard, and said, in a low voice, "Your sister!"

Vizard started a little at the suddenness of this, but he said nothing; he did not know what to say.

When she had waited a little, and he said nothing, she spoke again. "Tell me something about her. Is she good? Forgive me; it is not that I doubt."

"She is good, according to her lights."

"Is she proud?"

"Yes."

"Is she just?"

"No. And I never met a woman that was."

"Indeed it is rare. Why does she not visit me?"

"I don't know."

"She blames me for all that has happened."

"I don't know, madam. My sister looks very ill, and keeps her own room. If she does not visit you, she holds equally aloof from us all. She has not taken a single meal with me for some days."

"Since I was your patient and your guest."

"Pray do not conclude from that—— Who can interpret a woman?"

"Another woman. Enigmas to you, we are transparent to each other. Sir, will you grant me a favour? Will you persuade Miss Vizard to see me here alone—all alone? It will be a greater trial to me than to her, for I am weak. In this request I am not selfish. She can do nothing for me; but I can do a little for her, to pay the debt of gratitude I owe this hospitable house. May Heaven bless it, from the roof to the foundation stone!"

"I will speak to my sister, and she shall visit you—with the consent of your physician."

"It is well," said Ina Klosking, and beckoned her friends; one of whom, Miss Gale, proceeded to feel her pulse, with suspicious glances at Vizard. But she found the pulse calm, and said so.

Vizard took his leave and went straight to Zoe's room. She was not there. He was glad of that; for it gave him hopes she was going to respect his advice and give up her solitary life.

He went downstairs and on to the lawn to look for her. He could not see her anywhere.

At last, when he had given up looking for her, he found her in his study, crouched in a corner.

She rose at sight of him and stood before him. "Harrington," said she, in rather a commanding way, "Aunt Maitland is ill, and I wish to go to her."

Harrington stared at her with surprise. "You are not well enough yourself."

"Quite well enough in body to go anywhere."

"Well, but," said Harrington—she caught him up impatiently. "Surely you cannot object to my visiting Aunt Maitland. She is dangerously ill. I had a second letter, this morning—see." And she held him out a letter.

Harrington was in a difficulty. He felt sure this was not her real motive; but he did not like to say so, harshly, to an unhappy girl. He took a moderate course. "Not just now, dear," he said.

"What! am I to wait till she dies?" cried Zoe, getting agitated at his opposition.

"Be reasonable, dear. You know you are the mistress of this house. Do not desert me just now. Consider the position. It is a very chattering county. I entertain Mademoiselle Klosking; I could not do otherwise when she was nearly killed in my hall. But for my sister to go away whilst she remains here would have a bad effect."

"It is too late to think of that, Harrington. The mischief is done; and you must plead your eccentricity. Why should I bear the blame? I never approved of it."

"You would have sent her to an inn, eh?"

"No; but Miss Gale offered to take her."

"Then I am to understand that you propose to mark your reprobation of my conduct by leaving my house."

"What! publicly? Oh no. You may say to yourself that your sister could not bear to stay under the same roof with Mr. Severne's mistress. But this chattering county shall never know my mind. My aunt is dangerously ill. She lives but thirty miles off. She is a fit object of pity. She is a—respectable—lady; she is all alone: no female physician; no flirt, turned sister of charity; no woman-hater—to fetch

and carry for her. And so I shall go to her. I am your sister, not your slave. If you grudge me your horses, I will go on foot."

Vizard was white with wrath, but governed himself like a man. "Go on, young lady," said he; "go on. Jeer, and taunt, and wound the best brother any young madwoman ever had. But don't think I'll answer you as you deserve; I'm too cunning. If I was to say an unkind word to you, I should suffer the tortures of the damned. So, go on."

"No, no. Forgive me, Harrington. It is your opposition that drives me wild. Oh, have pity on me. I shall go mad if I stay here. Do, pray, pray, pray let me go to Aunt Maitland."

"You shall go, Zoe. But I tell you plainly, this step will be a blow to our affection—the first."

Zoe cried at that. But as she did not withdraw her request, Harrington told her, with cold civility, that she must be good enough to be ready directly after breakfast tomorrow, and take as little luggage as she could with convenience to herself.

Horses were sent on that night to the "Fox," an inn halfway between Vizard Court and Miss Maitland's place.

In the morning a light barouche, with a sling for luggage, came round, and Zoe was soon seated in it. Then, to her surprise, Harrington came out and sat beside her.

She was pleased at this and said, "What! are you going with me, dear; all that way?"

"Yes, to save appearances," said he; and took out a newspaper to read.

This froze Zoe, and she retired within herself.

It was a fine fresh morning; the coachman drove fast; the air fanned her cheek; the motion was enlivening; the horses' hoofs rang quick and clear upon the road. Fresh objects met the eye every moment. Her heart was as sad and aching as before; but there arose a faint encouraging sense that some day she might be better, or things might take some turn.

When they had rolled about ten miles, she said in a low voice, "Harrington."

"Well?"

"You were right. Cooping one's self up is the way to go mad."

"Of course it is."

"I feel a little better now; a very little."

"I am glad of it."

But he was not hearty, and she said no more.

He was extremely attentive to her all the journey, and indeed had never been half so polite to her.

This, however, led to a result he did not intend nor anticipate. Zoe, being now cool, fell into a state of compunction and dismay. She saw his affection for her leaving him, and stiff politeness coming instead.

She leaned forward, put her hands on his knees, and looked all scared, in his face. "Harrington!" she cried, "I was wrong. What is Aunt Maitland to me? You are my all. Bid him turn the horses' heads and go home."

"Why, we are only six miles from the place."

"What does that matter? We shall have had a good long drive together, and I will dine with you after it; and I will ride or drive with you every day, if you will let me."

Vizard could not help smiling. He was disarmed. "You impulsive young monkey," said he, "I shall do nothing of the kind. In the first place, I couldn't turn back from anything; I'm only a man. In the next place, I have been thinking it over as you have; and this is a good move of ours, though I was a little mortified at first. Occupation is the best cure of love; and this old lady will find you plenty. Besides, nursing improves the character. Look at that frivolous girl, Fanny, how she has come out. And you know, Zoe, if you get sick of it in a day or two, you have only to write to me, and I will send for you directly. A short absence, with so reasonable a motive as visiting a sick aunt, will provoke no comments. It is all for the best."

This set Zoe at her ease; and brother and sister resumed their usual manners.

They reached Miss Maitland's house, and were admitted to her sick-room. She was really very ill; and thanked them so pathetically for coming to visit a poor lone old woman, that now they were both glad they had come.

Zoe entered on her functions with an alacrity that surprised herself; and Vizard drove away. But he did not drive straight home. He had started from Vizard Court with other views. He had telegraphed Lord Uxmoor the night before, and now drove to his place, which was only five

miles distant. He found him at home, and soon told him his errand. "Do you remember meeting a young fellow at my house called Severne?"

"I do," said Lord Uxmoor, drily enough.

"Well, he has turned out an impostor."

Uxmoor's eye flashed. He had always suspected Severne of being his rival, and a main cause of his defeat. "An impostor?" said he; "that is rather a strong word. Certainly I never heard a gentleman tell such a falsehood as he volunteered about — what's the fellow's name? — a detective."

"Oh, Poikilus. That is nothing. That was one of his white lies. He is a villain all round, and a forger by way of climax."

"A forger! What! a criminal?"

"Rather. Here are his drafts. The drawer and acceptor do not exist. The whole thing was written by Edward Severne, whose endorsement figures on the bill. He got me to cash these bills. I deposit them with you, and I ask you for a warrant to commit him—if he should come this way."

"Is that likely?"

"Not at all; it is a hundred to one he never shows his nose again in Barfordshire. When he was found out he bolted, and left his very clothes in my house. I packed them off to the 'Swan' at Taddington. He has never been heard of since; and I have warned him, by advertisement, that he will be arrested if ever he sets foot in Barfordshire."

"Well, then?"

"Well, then—I am not going to throw away a chance. The beggar had the impudence to spoon on my sister Zoe. That was my fault, not hers. He was an old college acquaintance, and I gave him opportunities: I deserve to be horsewhipped. However, I am not going to commit the same blunder twice. My sister is in your neighbourhood for a few days."

"Ah!"

"And perhaps you will be good enough to keep your eye on her."

"I feel much honoured by such a commission. But you have not told me where Miss Vizard is."

"With her aunt, Miss Maitland, at Somerville Villa, near Bagley. *À propos,* I had better tell you what she is there for, or your good Dowager will be asking her to parties. She has come to nurse her Aunt Maitland. The old lady is seriously

ill, and all our young coquettes are going in for nursing. We have a sick lady at our house, I am sorry to say, and she is nursed like a queen by Doctress Gale and ex-Flirt Fanny Dover. Now is fulfilled the saying that was said—

'Oh woman, in our hours of ease;'

I spare you the rest, and simply remark that our Zoe, fired by the example of these two ladies, has devoted herself to nursing Aunt Maitland. It is very good of her, but experience tells me she will very soon find it extremely trying; and as she is a very pretty girl, and therefore a fit subject of male charity, you might pay her a visit now and then, and show her that this best of all possible worlds contains young gentlemen of distinction, with long and glossy beards, as well as peevish old women, who are extra selfish and tyrannical when they happen to be sick."

Uxmoor positively radiated as this programme was unfolded to him. Vizard observed that and chuckled inwardly.

He then handed him the forged acceptances.

Lord Uxmoor begged him to write down the facts on paper, and also his application for the warrant. He did so. Lord Uxmoor locked the paper up, and the friends parted. Vizard drove off, easy in his mind, and congratulating himself, not unreasonably, on his little combination, by means of which he had provided his sister with a watch-dog, a companion, and an honourable lover, all in one.

Uxmoor put on his hat and strode forth into his own grounds, with his heart beating high at this strange turn of things in favour of his love.

Neither foresaw the strange combinations which were to arise out of an event that appeared so simple and one-sided.

CHAPTER XXIV

Ina Klosking's cure was retarded by the state of her mind. The excitement and sharp agony her physician had feared died away as the fever of the brain subsided; but then there settled down a grim, listless lethargy, which obstructed her return to health and vigour. Once she said to Rhoda Gale, "But I have nothing to get well for." As a rule, she did

not speak her mind, but thought a great deal. She often asked after Zoe; and her nurses could see that her one languid anxiety was somehow connected with that lady. Yet she did not seem hostile to her now, nor jealous. It was hard to understand her; she was reserved, and very deep.

The first relief to the deadly languor of her mind came to her from Music. That was no great wonder; but, strange to say, the music that did her good was neither old enough to be revered, nor new enough to be fashionable. It was English music too, and *passée* music. She came across a collection of Anglican anthems and services—written, most of it, towards the end of the last century and the beginning of this. The composers' names promised little: they were Blow, Nares, Greene, Kent, King, Jackson, &c. The words and the music of these compositions seemed to suit one another; and, as they were all quite new to her, she went through them almost eagerly, and hummed several of the strains, and with her white but now thin hand beat time to others. She even sent for Vizard, and said to him, "You have a treasure here. Do you know these compositions?"

He inspected his treasure. "I remember," said he, "my mother used to sing this one, 'When the eye saw her, then it blessed her;' and parts of this one, 'Hear my prayer:' and let me see, she used to sing this psalm, 'Praise the Lord,' by Jackson. I am ashamed to say I used to ask for 'Praise the Lord Jackson,' meaning to be funny, not devout."

"She did not choose ill," said Ina. "I thought I knew English music, yet here is a whole stream of it new to me. Is it esteemed?"

"I think it was once, but it has had its day."

"That is strange; for here are some immortal qualities. These composers had brains, and began at the right end; they selected grand and tuneful words, great and pious thoughts; they impregnated themselves with those words, and produced appropriate music. The harmonies are sometimes thin, and the writers seem scarcely to know the skilful use of discords; but they had heart and invention; they saw their way clear, before they wrote the first note: there is an inspired simplicity and fervour. If all these choice things are dead, they must have fallen upon bad interpreters."

"No doubt," said Vizard, "so please get well, and let me hear these pious strains, which my poor dear mother loved so well, interpreted worthily."

The Klosking's eyes filled. "That is a temptation," said she simply. Then she turned to Rhoda Gale. "Sweet physician, he has done me good. He has given me something to get well for."

Vizard's heart yearned. "Do not talk like that," said he buoyantly; then in a broken voice, "Heaven forbid you should have nothing better to live for than that."

"Sir," said she gravely, "I have nothing better to live for now than to interpret good music worthily."

There was a painful silence.

Ina broke it. She said, quite calmly, "First of all, I wish to know how others interpret these strains your mother loved, and I have the honour to agree with her."

"Oh," said Vizard, "we will soon manage that for you. These things are not defunct; only unfashionable. Every choir in England has sung them, and can sing them, after a fashion; so, at 12 o'clock to-morrow, look out—for squalls!"

He mounted his horse, rode into the cathedral town—distant eight miles—and arranged with the organist for himself, four leading boys, and three lay clerks. He was to send a carriage in for them, after the morning service, and return them in good time for vespers.

Fanny told Ina Klosking, and she insisted on getting up.

By this time Doctress Gale had satisfied herself that a little excitement was downright good for her patient, and led to refreshing sleep. So they dressed her loosely but very warmly, and rolled her to the window on her invalid couch, set at a high angle. It was a fine clear day in October, keen but genial; and after muffling her well, they opened the window.

While she sat there, propped high, and inhaling the pure air, Vizard conveyed his little choir, by another staircase, into the ante-chamber; and, under his advice, they avoided preludes, and opened in full chorus with Jackson's song of praise.

At the first burst of sacred harmony, Ina Klosking was observed to quiver all over.

They sang it rather coarsely, but correctly and boldly, and with a certain fervour. There were no operatic artifices to remind her of earth; the purity and the harmony struck her

full. The great singer and sufferer lifted her clasped hands to God, and the tears flowed fast down her cheeks.

These tears were balm to that poor lacerated soul, tormented by many blows.

> "O lacrymarum fons, tenero sacros
> Ducemtium ortus ex animo, quater
> Felix, in imo qui scatentem
> Pectore, te, pia nympha, sensit."

Rhoda Gale, who hated music like poison, crept up to her, and enfolding her delicately, laid a pair of wet eyes softly on her shoulder.

Vizard now tapped at the door, and was admitted from the music-room. He begged Ina to choose another composition from her book. She marked a service and two anthems, and handed him the volume, but begged they might not be done too soon, one after the other. That would be quite enough for one day, especially if they would be good enough to repeat the hymn of praise to conclude; "for," said she, "these are things to be digested."

Soon the boys' pure voices rose again, and those poor dead English composers, with prosaic names, found their way again to the great foreign singer's soul.

They sang an anthem, which is now especially despised by those great critics, the organists of the country—"My Song shall be of Mercy and Judgment."

The Klosking forgave the thinness of the harmony, and many little faults in the vocal execution. The words, no doubt, went far with her, being clearly spoken. She sat meditating, with her moist eyes raised, and her face transfigured, and at the end she murmured to Vizard, with her eyes still raised, "After all, they are great and pious words, and the music has at least this crowning virtue—it means the words." Then she suddenly turned upon him and said, "There is another person in this house who needs this consolation as much as I do. Why does she not come? But perhaps she is with the musicians."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Your sister."

"Why, she is not in the house."

Ina Klosking started at that information, and bent her eyes keenly and inquiringly on him.

"She left two days ago."

"Indeed!"

"To nurse a sick aunt."

"Indeed! Had she no other reason?"

"Not that I know of," said Vizard; but he could not help colouring a little.

The little choir now sang a service, King, in F. They sang the "Magnificat" rudely, and rather profanely, but recovered themselves in the "Dimittis."

When it was over Ina whispered, "'To be a light to lighten the Gentiles.' That is an inspired duet. Oh, how it might be sung!"

"Of course it might," whispered Vizard; "so you have something to get well for."

"Yes, my friend—thanks to you and your sainted mother."

This, uttered in a voice which, under the healing influence of music, seemed to have regained some of its rich melody, was too much for our cynic, and he bustled off to hide his emotion, and invited the musicians to lunch.

All the servants had been listening on the stairs, and the hospitable old butler plied the boys with sparkling Moselle, which, being himself reared on mighty port, he thought a light and playful wine—just the thing for women and children. So after luncheon they sang rather wild, and the Klosking told Vizard drily that would do for the present.

Then he ordered the carriage for them, and asked Mademoiselle Klosking when she would like them again.

"When *can* I?" she inquired, rather timidly.

"Every day, if you like—Sundays and all."

"I must be content with every other day."

Vizard said he would arrange it so, and was leaving her; but she begged him to stay a moment.

"She would be safer here," said she, very gravely.

Vizard was taken aback by the suddenness of this return to a topic he was simple enough to think she had abandoned. However, he said, "She is safe enough. I have taken care of that, you may be sure."

"You have done well, sir," said Ina, very gravely.

She said no more to him; but just before dinner Fanny came in, and Miss Gale went for a walk in the garden. Ina pinned Fanny directly. "Where is Miss Vizard?" said she quietly.

Fanny coloured up; but seeing in a moment that fibs would be dangerous, said mighty carelessly, "She is at Aunt Maitland's."

"Where does *she* live, dear?"

"In a poky little place called 'Somerville Villa.'"

"Far from this?"

"Not very. It is forty miles by the railway, but not thirty by the road; and Zoe went in the barouche all the way."

Mademoiselle Klosking thought a little, and then taking Fanny Dover's hand, said to her, very sweetly, "I beg you to honour me with your confidence, and tell me something. Believe me, it is for no selfish motive I ask you; but I think Miss Vizard is in danger. She is too far from her brother, and too far from me. Mr. Vizard says she is safe. Now, can you tell me what he means? How can she be safe? Is her heart turned to stone, like mine?"

"No, indeed," said Fanny. "Yes, I will be frank with you; for I believe you are wiser than any one of us. Zoe is not safe, left to herself. Her heart is anything but stone; and heaven knows what wild, mad thing she might be led into. But I know perfectly well what Vizard means. No, I don't like to tell it you all. It will give you pain."

"There is little hope of that. I am past pain."

"Well, then—Miss Gale will scold me."

"No, she shall not."

"Oh, I know you have got the upper hand even of her; so if you promise I shall not be scolded, I'll tell you. You see, I had my misgivings about this very thing; and as soon as Vizard came home—it was he who took her to Aunt Maitland—I asked him what precautions he had taken to hinder that man from getting hold of her again. Well then—oh, I ought to have begun by telling you Mr. Severne forged bills to get money out of Harrington."

"Good heavens!"

"Oh, Harrington will never punish him, if he keeps his distance; but he has advertised in all the papers, warning him that, if he sets foot in Barfordshire, he will be arrested and sent to prison."

Ina Klosking shook her head. "When a man is in love with such a woman as that, dangers could hardly deter him."

"That depends upon the man, I think. But Harrington has done better than that. He has provided her with a watch-dog—the best of all watch-dogs, another lover. Lord Uxmoor lives near Aunt Maitland, and he adores Zoe; so

Harrington has commissioned him to watch her, and cure her and all. I wish he'd cure *me*—an earl's coronet and twenty thousand a year!"

"You relieve my mind," said Ina. Then, after a pause—"But let me ask you one question more. Why did you not tell me Miss Vizard was gone?"

"I don't know," said Fanny, colouring up. "*She* told me not."

"Who?"

"Why, the Vixen in command. She orders everybody."

"And why did she forbid you?"

"Don't know."

"Yes, you do. Kiss me, dear. There, I will distress you with no more questions. Why should I? Our instincts seldom deceive us. Well, so be it; I have something more to get well for, and I will."

Fanny looked up at her inquiringly.

"Yes," said she; "the daughter of this hospitable house will never return to it whilst I am in it. Poor girl! She thinks *she* is the injured woman. So be it. I will get well—and leave it."

Fanny communicated this to Miss Gale, and all she said was, "She shall go no farther than Hillstoke, then; for I love her better than any man can love her."

Fanny did not tell Vizard; and he was downright happy, seeing the woman he loved recover, by slow degrees, her health, her strength, her colour, her voice. Parting was not threatened. He did not realise that they should ever part at all. He had vague hopes that, whilst she was under his roof, opportunity might stand his friend, and she might requite his affection. All this would not bear looking into very closely; for that very reason he took particular care not to look into it very closely, but hoped all things, and was happy. In this condition he received a little shock.

A one-horse fly was driven up to the door, and a card brought in—

"Mr. Joseph Ashmead."

Vizard was always at home at Vizard Court, except to convicted bores. Mr. Ashmead was shown into his study.

Vizard knew him at a glance. The velveteen coat had

yielded to tweed; but another loud tie had succeeded to the one "that fired the air at Homburg." There, too, was the wash-leather face, and other traits Vizard professed to know an actress's lover by. Yes, it was the very man, at sight of whom he had fought down his admiration of La Klosking, and declined an introduction to her. Vizard knew the lady better now. But still he was a little jealous even of her acquaintances, and thought this one unworthy of her; so he received him with stiff but guarded politeness, leaving him to open his business.

Ashmead, overawed by the avenue, the dozen gables, four score chimneys, &c., addressed him rather obsequiously, but with a certain honest trouble, that soon softened the bad impression caused by his appearance.

"Sir," said he, "pray excuse this intrusion of a stranger; but I am in great anxiety. It is not for myself, but for a lady, a very distinguished lady, whose interests I am charged with. It is Mademoiselle Klosking, the famous singer."

Vizard maintained a grim silence.

"You may have heard of her."

"I have."

"I almost fancy you once heard her sing—at Homburg."

"I did."

"Then I am sure you must have admired her, being a gentleman of taste. Well, sir, it is near a fortnight since I heard from her."

"Well, sir?"

"You will say, what is that to you? But the truth is, she left me, in London, to do certain business for her, and she went down to this very place. I offered to come with her, but she declined. To be sure, it was a delicate matter, and not at all in my way. She was to write to me, and report progress, and give me her address, that I might write to her; but nearly a fortnight has passed. I have not received a single letter. I am in real distress and anxiety. A great career awaits her in England, sir; but this silence is so mysterious, so alarming, that I begin actually to hope she has played the fool, and thrown it all up, and gone abroad with that blackguard."

"What blackguard, sir?"

Joseph drew in his horns. "I spoke too quick, sir," said he; "it is no business of mine. But these brilliant women are as mad as the rest in throwing away their affections.

They prefer a blackguard to a good man. It is the rule. Excuse my plain-speaking."

"Mr. Ashmead," said Vizard, "I may be able to answer your questions about this lady; but, before I do so, it is right I should know how far you possess her confidence. To speak plainly, have you any objection to tell me what is the precise relation between you and her?"

"Certainly not, sir; I am her theatrical agent."

"Is that all?"

"Not quite. I have been a good deal about her lately, and have seen her in deep distress. I think I may almost say I am her friend, though a very humble one."

Vizard did not yet quite realise the truth, that this Bohemian had in his heart one holy spot,—his pure devotion and unsexual friendship for that great artist. Still his prejudices were disarmed, and he said, "Well, Mr. Ashmead, excuse my cross-questioning you. I will now give myself the pleasure of setting your anxieties at rest. Mademoiselle Klosking is in this house."

Ashmead stared at him, and then broke out, "In this house? O Lord! how can that be?"

"It happened in a way very distressing to us all, though the result is now so delightful. Mademoiselle Klosking called here on a business with which, perhaps, you are acquainted."

"I am, sir."

"Unfortunately, she met with an accident in my very hall —an accident that endangered her life, sir; and of course we took charge of her. She has had a zealous physician, and good nurses, and she is recovering slowly. She is quite out of danger, but still weak. I have no doubt she will be delighted to see you. Only, as we are all under the orders of her physician, and that physician is a woman, and a bit of a vixen, you must allow me to go and consult her first."

Vizard retired, leaving Joseph happy, but mystified.

He was not long alone. In less than a minute he had for companions some well-buttered sandwiches made with smoked ham, and a bottle of old Madeira. The solids melted in his mouth, the liquid ran through his veins like oil charged with electricity and *elixir vitæ*.

By-and-by a female servant came for him and ushered him into Ina Klosking's room.

She received him with undisguised affection, and he had much ado to keep from crying. She made him sit down near

her in the vast embrasure of the window, and gave him a letter to read she had just written to him.

They compared notes very rapidly; but their discourse will not be given here, because so much of it would be repetition.

They were left alone to talk, and they did talk for more than an hour. The first interruption, indeed, was a recitativo with chords, followed by a verse from the leading treble.

Mr. Ashmead looked puzzled; the Klosking eyed him demurely.

Before the anthem concluded, Vizard tapped, and was admitted from the music-room. Ina smiled, and waved him to a chair. Both the men saw, by her manner, they were not to utter a sound while the music was going on. When it ceased she said, "Do you approve that, my friend?"

"If it pleases you, madam," replied the wary Ashmead.

"It does more than please me; it does me good."

"That reconciles me to it at once."

"Oh, then you do not admire it for itself?"

"Not—very—much."

"Pray speak plainly. I am not a tyrant, to impose my tastes."

"Well then, madam, I feel very grateful to anything that does you good; otherwise, I should say the music was—rather dreary, and the singing—very insipid."

The open struggle between Joseph's honesty and his awe of the Klosking tickled Vizard, so that he leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily.

The Klosking smiled superior. "He means," said she, "that the music is not operatic, and the boys do not clasp their hands, and shake their shoulders, and sing passionately, as women do in a theatre. Heaven forbid they should! If this world is all passion, there is another which is all peace; and these boys' sweet, artless tones, are the nearest thing we shall get in this world to the unimpassioned voices of the angels. They are fit instruments for pious words set by composers who, however obscure they may be, were men inspired, and have written immortal strains, which, as I hear them, seem hardly of this world—they are so free from all mortal dross."

Vizard assented warmly. Ashmead asked permission to hear another. They sang the "Magnificat" by King, in F.

"Upon my word," said Ashmead, "there is a good deal of 'go' in that."

Then they sang the "Nunc Dimittis." He said, a little drily, there was plenty of repose in that.

"My friend," said she, "there is—to the honour of the composer. The 'Magnificat' is the bright and lofty exultation of a young woman, who has borne the Messiah, and does not foresee His sufferings, only the boon to the world and the glory to herself. But the 'Dimittis' is the very opposite. It is a gentle joy, and the world contentedly resigned by a good old man, fatigued, who has run his race and longs to sleep after life's fever. When next you have the good fortune to hear that song, think you see the sun descending red and calm after a day of storms, and an aged Christian saying, 'Good night,'—and you will honour poor dead King as I do. The music that truly reflects great words was never yet small music, write it who may."

"You are right, madam," said Ashmead. "When I doubted its being good music, I suppose I meant saleable."

"Ah, *voilà!*" said the Klosking. Then, turning to Vizard for sympathy, "What this faithful friend understands by good music, is music that can be sold for a good deal of money."

"That is so," said Ashmead stoutly. "I am a theatrical agent. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. You have tried it more than once, you know, but it would not work."

Ashmead amused Vizard, and he took him into his study, and had some more conversation with him. He even asked him to stay in the house; but Ashmead was shy, and there was a theatre at Taddington. So he said he had a good deal of business to do; he had better make the "Swan" his headquarters. "I shall be at your service all the same, sir, or Mademoiselle Klosking's."

"Have a glass of Madeira, Mr. Ashmead."

"Well, sir, to tell the truth, I *have* had one or two."

"Then it knows the road."

"You are very good, sir. What Madeira! Is this the wine the doctors ran down a few years ago? They couldn't have tasted it."

"Well, it is like ourselves, improved by travelling. That has been twice to India."

"It will never go again, past me," said Ashmead gaily. "My mouth is a cape it will never weather."

He went to his inn.

Before he had been there ten minutes, up rattled a smart servant in a smart dog-cart.

"Hamper—for Joseph Ashmead, Esquire."

"Anything to pay?"

"What for?—it's from Vizard Court."

And the dog-cart rattled away.

Joseph was in the hall, and witnessed this phenomenon. He said to himself, "I wish I had a vast acquaintance—ALL COUNTRY GENTLEMEN."

That afternoon Ina Klosking insisted on walking up and down the room, supported by Mesdemoiselles Gale and Dover. The result was fatigue and sleep; that is all.

"To-morrow," said she, "I will have but one live crutch. I must and will recover my strength."

In the evening she insisted on both ladies dining with Mr. Vizard. Here, too, she had her way.

Vizard was in very good spirits, and when the servants were gone, complimented Miss Gale on her skill.

"*Our* skill, you mean," said she. "It was you who prescribed this new medicine of the mind, the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; and it was you who administered the Ashmead, and he made her laugh, or nearly—and that *we* have never been able to do. She must take a few grains of Ashmead every day. The worst of it is, I am afraid we shall cure her too quickly; and then we shall lose her. But that was to be expected. I am very unfortunate in my attachments. I always was. If I fall in love with a woman, she is sure to hate me, or else die, or else fly away. I love this one to distraction, so she is sure to desert me, because she couldn't misbehave, and I won't *let* her die."

"Well," said Vizard, "you know what to do. Retard the cure. That is one of the arts of your profession."

"And so it is; but how can I, when I love her? No, we must have recourse to our benevolent tyrant again. He must get Miss Vizard back here, before my goddess is well enough to spread her wings and fly."

Vizard looked puzzled. "This," said he, "sounds like a riddle, or female logic."

"It is both," said Rhoda. "Miss Dover, give him the *mot d'énigme*. I'm off—to the patient I adore."

She vanished swiftly; and Vizard looked to Fanny for a

solution. But Fanny seemed rather vexed with Miss Gale, and said nothing. Then he pressed her to explain.

She answered him, with a certain reluctance, "Mademoiselle Klosking has taken into her head that Zoe will never return to this house whilst she is in it."

"Who put that into her head, now?" said Vizard bitterly.

"Nobody, upon my honour. A woman's instinct."

"Well?"

"She is horrified at the idea of keeping your sister out of her own house, so she is getting well to go; and the strength of her will is such that she *will* get well."

"All the better; but Zoe will soon get tired of Somerville Villa. A little persuasion will bring her home, especially if you were to offer to take her place."

"Oh, I would do that to oblige you, Harrington, if I saw any good at the end of it. But please think twice. How can Zoe and that lady ever stay under the same roof? How can they meet at your table, and speak to each other? They are rivals."

"They are both getting cured; and neither will ever see the villain again."

"I hope not; but who can tell? Well, never mind *them*. If their eyes are not opened by this time, they will get no pity from me. It is you I think of now." Then, in a hesitating way, and her cheeks mantling higher and higher with honest blushes—"You have suffered enough already from women. I know it is not my business, but it does grieve me to see you going into trouble again. What good can come of it? Her connection with that man, so recent, and so—strange. The world *will* interpret its own way. Your position in the county—every eye upon you. I see the way in—no doubt it is strewed with flowers; but I see no way out. Be brave in time, Harrington. It will not be the first time. She must be a good woman somehow, or faces, eyes, and voices, and ways, are all a lie. But if she is good, she is very unfortunate; and she will give you a sore heart for life if you don't mind. I'd clench my teeth, and shut my eyes, and let her go in time."

Vizard groaned aloud, and at that a tear or two rolled down Fanny's burning cheeks.

"You are a good little girl," said Vizard affectionately; "but I *cannot*."

He hung his head despondently and muttered, "I see no way out either; but I yield to fate. I feared her, and

fled from her. She has followed me. I can resist no more. I drift. Some men never know happiness. I shall have had a happy fortnight, at all events. I thank you, and respect you for your advice; but I can't take it. So now I suppose you will be too much offended to oblige me."

"Oh dear, no."

"Would you mind writing to Aunt Maitland, and saying you would like to take Zoe's place?"

"I will do it with pleasure, to oblige you. Besides, it will be a fib, and it is so long since I have told a good fib. When shall I write?"

"Oh, about the end of the week."

"Yes, that will be time enough. Miss Gale won't *let* her go till next week. Ah, after all, how nice and natural it is to be naughty! Fibs and flirtation, welcome home! This is the beauty of being good—and I shall recommend it to all my friends on this very account—you can always leave off at a moment's notice, without any trouble. Now, naughtiness sticks to you like a burr."

So, with no more ado, this new Mentor became Vizard's accomplice, and they agreed to get Zoe back before the Klosking could get strong enough to move with her physician's consent.

As the hamper of Madeira was landed in the hall of the "Swan" inn, a genial voice cried, "You are in luck." Ashmead turned, and there was Poikilus peering at him from the doorway of the commercial room.

"What is the game now?" thought Ashmead. But what he said was, "Why, I know that face. I declare, it is the gent that treated me at Homburg. Bring in the hamper, Dick." Then to Poikilus, "Have ye dined yet?"

"No. Going to dine in half an hour. Roast gosling. Just enough for two."

"We'll divide it, if you like, and I'll stand a bottle of old Madeira. My old friend, Squire Vizard, has just sent it me. I'll just have a splash; dinner will be ready by then." He bustled out of the room, but said as he went, "I say, old man, open the hamper, and put two bottles just within the smile of the fire."

He then went upstairs, and plunged his head in cold water, to clear his faculties for the encounter.

The friends sat down to dinner, and afterwards to the

Madeira, both gay and genial outside, but within full of design—their object being to pump each other.

In the encounter at Homburg, Ashmead had an advantage; Poikilus thought himself unknown to Ashmead. But this time there was a change. Poikilus knew by this time that La Klosking had gone to Vizard Court. How she had known Severne was there puzzled him a good deal; but he had ended by suspecting Ashmead, in a vague way.

The parties, therefore, met on even terms. Ashmead resolved to learn what he could about Severne, and Poikilus to learn what he could about Zoe Vizard and Mademoiselle Klosking.

Ashmead opened the ball. "Been long here?"

"Just come."

"Business?"

"Yes. Want to see if there's any chance of my getting paid for that job."

"What job?"

"Why, the Homburg job. Look here—I don't know why I should have any secrets from a good fellow like you; only you must not tell anybody else."

"Oh, honour bright!"

"Well, then, I am a detective."

"Ye don't mean that?"

"I'm Poikilus."

"Good heavens! Well, I don't care. I haven't murdered anybody. Here's your health, Poikilus. I say, you could tell a tale or two."

"That I could. But I'm out of luck this time. The gentleman that employed me has mizzled; and he promised me fifty pounds. I came down here in hopes of finding him. Saw him once in this neighbourhood."

"Well, you won't find him here, I don't think. You must excuse me, but your employer is a villain. He has knocked a lady down, and nearly killed her."

"You don't say that?"

"Yes, that beautiful lady, the singer, you saw in Homburg."

"What! the lady that said he should have his money?"

"The same."

"Why, he must be mad."

"No,—a scoundrel; *that is all.*"

"Then she won't give him his money after that?"

"Not if I can help it. But if she likes to pay you your commission, I shall not object to that."

"You are a good fellow."

"What is more, I shall see her to-morrow, and I will put the question to her for you."

Poikilus was profuse in his thanks, and said he began to think it was his only chance. Then he had a misgiving. "I have no claim on the lady," said he; "and I am afraid I have been a bad friend to her. I did not mean it though, and the whole affair is dark to me."

"You are not very sharp, then, for a detective," said Ashmead. "Well, shut your mouth and open your eyes. Your Mr. Severne was the lady's lover, and preyed upon her. He left her; she was fool enough to love him still, and pined for him. He is a gambler, and was gambling by my side when Mademoiselle Klosking came in; so he cut his lucky, and left me fifty pounds to play for him, and she put the pot on, and broke the bank. I didn't know who he was, but we found it out by his photograph. Then you came smelling after the money, and we sold you nicely, my fine detective. We made it our business to know where you wrote to. Vizard Court. She went down there, and found him just going to be married to a beautiful young lady. She collared him. He flung her down, and cut her temple open—nearly killed her. She lies ill in the house; and the other young lady is gone away broken-hearted."

"Where to?"

"How should I know? What is that to you?"

"Why, don't you see? Wherever she is, he won't be far off. He likes her best, don't he?"

"It don't follow that she likes him, now she has found him out. He had better not go after her, or he'll get a skinful of broken bones. My friend, Squire Vizard, is the man to make short work with him, if he caught the blackguard spooning after his sister."

"And serve him right. Still, I wish I knew where that young lady is."

"I daresay I could learn, if I made it my business."

Having brought the matter to that point, Poikilus left it, and simply made himself agreeable. He told Ashmead his experiences; and as they were, many of them, strange and dramatic, he kept him a delighted listener till midnight.

The next day Ashmead visited Mademoiselle Klosking, and found her walking up and down the room with her hand on Miss Gale's shoulder.

She withdrew into the embrasure, and had some confidential talk with him. As a matter of course, he told her about Poikilus, and that be was hunting down Severne for his money.

"Indeed!" said the Klosking. "Please tell me every word that passed between you."

He did so, as nearly as he could remember.

Mademoiselle Klosking leaned her brow upon her hand a considerable time, in thought. Then she turned on Ashmead, and said quietly, "That Poikilus is still acting for *him*, and the one thing they desire to learn is where to find Miss Vizard, and delude her to her ruin."

"No, no," cried Ashmead violently; but the next moment his countenance fell. "You are wiser than I am," said he; "it may be. Confound the sneak! I'll give it him, next time I see him. Why, he must love villainy for its own sake. I as good as said you would pay him his fifty pounds."

"What fifty pounds? His fifty pounds is a falsehood like himself. Now, my friend, please take my instructions, my positive instructions."

"Yes, madam."

"You will not change your friendly manner. Show no suspicion nor anger. If they are cunning, we must be wise; and the wise always keep their temper. You will say Miss Vizard has gone to Ireland, but to what part is only known to her brother. Tell him this, and be very free and communicative on all other subjects; for this alone has any importance now. As for me, I can easily learn where Somerville Villa is; and, in a day or two, shall send you to look after her. One thing is clear—I had better lose no time in recovering my strength. Well, my will is strong; I will lose no time. Your arm, monsieur;" and she resumed her promenade.

Ashmead, instructed as above, dined again with the detective; but out of revenge gave him but one bottle of Madeira. As they sipped it, he delivered a great many words; and in the middle of them said, "Oh, by-the-bye, I asked after that poor young lady. Gone to Ireland, but they didn't know what part."

After dinner, Ashmead went to the theatre. When he came back, Poikilus was gone.

So did Wisdom baffle Cunning that time.

But Cunning did not really leave the field; that very evening an aged man, in green spectacles, was inquiring about the postal arrangements to Vizard Court; and the next day he might have been seen, in a back street of Taddington, talking to the village postman, and afterwards drinking with him. It was Poikilus groping his way.

CHAPTER XXV

A FEW words avail to describe the sluggish waters of the Dead Sea, but what pen can portray the Indian Ocean lashed and tormented by a cyclone?

Even so, a few words have sufficed to show that Ina Klosking's heart was all benumbed and deadened; and, with the help of insult, treachery, loss of blood, brain-fever, and self-esteem rebelling against villainy, had outlived its power of suffering poignant torture.

But I cannot sketch in a few words, nor paint in many, the tempest of passion in Zoe Vizard. Yet it is my duty to try and give the reader some little insight into the agony, the changes, the fury, the grief, the tempest of passion, in a virgin heart. In such a nature, the great passions of the mind often rage as fiercely, or even more so, than in older and experienced women.

Literally, Zoe Vizard loved Edward Severne one minute and hated him the next; gave him up for a traitor, and then vowed to believe nothing until she had heard his explanation; burned with ire at his silence, sickened with dismay at his silence. Then, for a while, love and faith would get the upper hand, and she would be quite calm. Why should she torment herself? An old sweetheart, abandoned long ago, had come between them; he had, unfortunately, done the woman an injury in his wild endeavour to get away from her. Well; what business had she to use force? No doubt he was ashamed, afflicted at what he had done, being a man; or was in despair, seeing that lady installed in her brother's house, and *her* story, probably a parcel of falsehoods, listened to.

Then she would have a gleam of joy; for she knew he had not written to Ina Klosking. But soon Despondency came

down like a dark cloud; for she said to herself, "He has left us both. He sees the woman he does not love will not let him have the one he does love; and so he has lost heart, and will have no more to say to either."

When her thoughts took this turn, she would cry piteously; but not for long. She would dry her eyes, and burn with wrath all round; she would still hate her rival, but call her lover a coward—a contemptible coward.

After her day of raging, and grieving, and doubting, and fearing, and hoping, and despairing, night overtook her with an exhausted body, a bleeding heart, and weeping eyes. She had been so happy—on the very brink of paradise; and now she was deserted. Her pillow was wet every night. She cried in her very sleep; and when she woke in the morning, her body was always quivering; and in the very act of waking came a horror and an instinctive reluctance to face the light that was to bring another day of misery.

Such is a fair, though loose, description of her condition.

The slight filip given to her spirits by the journey did her a morsel of good; but it died away. Having to nurse Aunt Maitland did her a little good at first. But she soon relapsed into herself, and became so *distraite* that Aunt Maitland, who was all self, being an invalid, began to speak sharply to her.

On the second day of her visit to Somerville Villa, as she sat brooding at the foot of her aunt's bed, suddenly she heard horses' feet, and then a ring at the hall-door. Her heart leaped. Perhaps he had come to explain all. He might not choose to go to Vizard Court. What if he had been watching as anxiously as herself, and had seized the first opportunity? In a moment her pale cheek rivalled carmine.

The girl brought up a card—

"Lord Uxmoor."

The colour died away directly. "Say I am very sorry, but at this moment I cannot leave my aunt."

The girl stared with amazement, and took down the message.

Uxmoor rode away.

Zoe felt a moment's pleasure. No; if she could not see the right man, she would not see the wrong. That at least was in her power.

Nevertheless, in the course of the day, remembering

Uxmoor's worth, and the pain she had already given him, she was almost sorry she had indulged herself at his expense.

Superfluous contrition! He came next day as a matter of course. She liked him none the better for coming, but she went downstairs to him.

He came towards her, but started back, and uttered an exclamation. "You are not well," he said, in tones of tenderness and dismay.

"Not very," she faltered; for his open, manly concern touched her.

"And you have come here to nurse this old lady? Indeed, Miss Vizard, you need nursing yourself. You know it is some time since I had the pleasure of seeing you, and the change is alarming. May I send you Dr. Atkins, my mother's physician?"

"I am much obliged to you. No."

"Oh, I forgot. You have a physician of your own sex. Why is she not looking after you?"

"Miss Gale is better employed. She is at Vizard Court in attendance on a far more brilliant person—Mademoiselle Klosking, a professional singer. Perhaps you know her?"

"I saw her at Homburg."

"Well, she met with an accident in our hall—a serious one; and Harrington took her in, and has placed all his resources—his lady physician and all—at her service: he is so fond of *music*."

A certain satirical bitterness peered through these words; but honest Uxmoor did not notice it. He said, "Then I wish you would let me be your doctor—for want of a better."

"And you think *you* can cure me?" said Zoe satirically.

"It does seem presumptuous. But, at least, I could do you a little good, if you could be got to try my humble prescription."

"What is it?" said Zoe listlessly.

"It is my mare Phillis. She is the delight of every lady who mounts her. She is thoroughbred, lively, swift, gentle, docile, amiable, perfect. Ride her on these downs, an hour or two every day. I'll send her over to-morrow. May I?"

"If you like. Rosa *would* pack up my riding-habit."

"Rosa was a prophetess."

Next day came Phillis, saddled, and led by a groom on horseback; and Uxmoor soon followed on an old hunter.

He lifted Zoe to her saddle, and away they rode, the groom following at a respectful distance.

When they got on the downs they had a delightful canter; but Zoe, in her fevered state of mind, was not content with that. She kept increasing the pace, till the old hunter could no longer live with the young filly; and she galloped away from Lord Uxmoor, and made him ridiculous in the eyes of his groom.

The truth is, she wanted to get away from him.

He drew the rein, and stood stock-still. She made a circuit of a mile and came up to him with heightened colour and flashing eyes, looking beautiful.

"Well?" said she. "Don't you like galloping?"

"Yes, but I don't like cruelty."

"Cruelty!"

"Look at the mare's tail how it is quivering, and her flanks panting! And no wonder. You have been over twice the Derby course, at a racing pace. Miss Vizard, a horse is not a steam-engine."

"I'll never ride her again," said Zoe. "I did not come here to be scolded. I will go home."

They walked slowly home in silence. Uxmoor hardly knew what to say to her; but at last he murmured apologetically, "Never mind the poor mare, if you are any better for galloping her."

She waited a moment before she spoke, and then she said, "Well, yes; I am better. I'm better for my ride, and better for my scolding. Good-bye." (Meaning for ever.)

"Good-bye," said he, in the same tone. Only he sent the mare next day, and followed her on a young thoroughbred.

"What!" said Zoe; "am I to have another trial?"

"And another after that."

So this time she would only canter very slowly, and kept stopping every now and then to inquire satirically, if that would distress the mare.

But Uxmoor was too good-humoured to quarrel for nothing. He only laughed and said, "You are not the only lady who takes a horse for a machine."

These rides did her bodily health some permanent good; but their effect on her mind was fleeting. She was in fair spirits when she was actually bounding through the air; but she collapsed afterwards.

At first, when she used to think that Severne never came

near her, and Uxmoor was so constant, she almost hated Uxmoor. So little does the wrong man profit by doing the right thing for a woman. I admit that, though not a deadly woman-hater myself.

But by-and-by she was impartially bitter against them both; the wrong man for doing the right thing, and the right man for not doing it.

As the days rolled by, and Severne did not appear, her indignation and wounded pride began to mount above her love. A beautiful woman counts upon pursuit, and thinks a man less than a man if he does not love her well enough to find her, though hid in the caves of ocean or the labyrinths of Bermondsey.

She said to herself, "Then he has no explanation to offer. Another woman has frightened him away from me. I have wasted my affections on a coward." Her bosom boiled with love, and contempt, and wounded pride; and her mind was tossed to and fro like a leaf in a storm. She began, by force of will, to give Uxmoor some encouragement; only, after it, she writhed and wept.

At last, finding herself driven to and fro like a leaf, she told Miss Maitland all, and sought counsel of her. She must have something to lean on.

The old lady was better by this time, and spoke kindly to her. She said Mr. Severne was charming, and she was not bound to give him up because another lady had past claims on him. But it appeared to her that Mr. Severne himself had deserted her. He had not written to her. Probably he knew something that had not yet transpired, and had steeled himself to the separation for good reasons. It was a decision she must accept. Let her then consider how forlorn is the condition of most deserted women compared with hers. Here was a devoted lover, whom she esteemed, and who could offer her a high position and an honest love. If she had a mother, that mother would almost force her to engage herself at once to Lord Uxmoor. Having no mother, the best thing she could do would be to force herself—to say some irrevocable words, and never look back. It was the lot of her sex not to marry the first love; and to be all the happier in the end for that disappointment, though at the time it always seemed eternal.

All this, spoken in a voice of singular kindness, by one who used to be so sharp, made Zoe's tears flow gently, and somewhat cooled her raging heart.

She began now to submit, and only cry at intervals, and let herself drift; and Uxmoor visited her every day, and she found it impossible not to esteem and regard him.

Nevertheless, one afternoon, just about his time, she was seized with such an aversion to his courtship, and such a revolt against the slope she seemed gliding down, that she flung on her bonnet and shawl, and darted out of the house to escape him. She said to the servant, "I am gone for a walk, if anybody calls."

Uxmoor did call, and receiving this message, he bit his lip; sent the horse home, and walked up to the windmill, on the chance of seeing her anywhere. He had already observed she was never long in one mood: and as he was always in the same mind, he thought perhaps he might be tolerably welcome, if he could meet her unexpected.

Meantime Zoe walked very fast to get away from the house as soon as possible, and she made a round of nearly five miles, walking through two villages, and on her return lost her way. However, a shepherd showed her a bridle-road, which, he told her, would soon take her to Somerville Villa, through "the small pastures;" and, accordingly, she came into a succession of meadows not very large. They were all fenced, and gated; but the gates were only shut, not locked. This was fortunate; for they were new five-barred gates, and a lady does not like getting over these even in solitude. Her clothes are not adapted.

There were sheep in some of these, cows in others, and the pastures wonderfully green and rich, being always well manured and fed down by cattle.

Zoe's love of colour was soothed by these emerald fields, dotted with white sheep and red cows.

In the last field, before the lane that led to the village, a single beast was grazing. Zoe took no notice of him, and walked on; but he took wonderful notice of her, and stared, then gave a disagreeable snort. He took offence at her Indian shawl; and, after pawing the ground and erecting his tail, he came straight at her, at a tearing trot, and his tail out behind him.

Zoe saw, and screamed violently, and ran for the gate ahead, which, of course, was a few yards farther from her than the gate behind. She ran for her life; but the bull, when he saw that, broke into a gallop directly, and came up fast with her. She could not escape.

At that moment a man vaulted clean over the gate, tore a pitchfork out of a heap of dung that luckily stood in the

corner, and boldly confronted the raging bull, just in time; for at that moment Zoe lost heart, and crouched, screaming, in the side ditch, with her hands before her eyes.

The new-comer, rash as his conduct seemed, was country-bred, and knew what he was about. He drove a prong clean through the great cartilage of the bull's mouth, and was knocked down like a ninepin, with the broken staff of the pitchfork in his hand; and the bull reared in the air with agony, the prong having gone clean through his upper lip, in two places, and fastened itself, as one fastens a pin, in that leathery but sensitive organ.

Now Uxmoor was a university athlete; he was no sooner down than up. So when the bull came down from his rearing and turned to massacre his assailant, he was behind him, and seizing his tail, twisted it, and delivered a thundering blow on his backbone, and followed it up by a shower of them on his ribs. "Run to the gate, Zoe!" he roared. Whack!—whack!—whack! "Run to the gate, I tell you!" Whack!—whack!—whack! whack!—whack!

Thus ordered, Zoe Vizard, who would not have moved of herself, being in a collapse of fear, scudded to the gate, got on the right side of it, and looked over, with two eyes like saucers. She saw a sight incredible to her. Instead of letting the bull alone, now she was safe, Uxmoor was sticking to him like a ferret. The bull ran, tossing his nose with pain, and bellowing; Uxmoor, dragged by the tail, and compelled to follow, in preposterous, giant strides, barely touching the ground with the point of his toe, pounded the creature's ribs with such blows as Zoe had never dreamed possible. They sounded like flail on wooden floor, and each blow was accompanied with a loud jubilant shout. Presently, being a five's player, and ambidexter, he shifted his hand, and the tremendous whacks resounded on the bull's left side. The bull, thus belaboured, and resounding like the big drum, made a circuit of the field, but found it all too hot. He knew his way to a certain quiet farmyard; he bolted, and came bang at Zoe once more with furious eyes and gore-distilling nostrils.

But this time she was on the right side of the gate.

Yet she drew back, in dismay, as the bull drew near; and she was right, for, in his agony and amazement, the unwieldy but sinewy brute leaped the five-barred gate, and cleared it all but the top rail. That he burst through, as if it had been paper, and dragged Uxmoor after him, and pulled him down and tore him some yards along the hard road on his back, and

bumped his head against a stone, and so got rid of him; then pounded away down the lane, snorting, and bellowing, and bleeding, the prong still stuck through his nostrils like a pin.

Zoe ran to Uxmoor with looks of alarm and tender concern, and lifted his head to her tender bosom; for his clothes were torn, and his cheeks and hands bleeding. But he soon shook off his confusion, and rose without assistance.

"Have you got over your fright?" said he; "that is the question."

"Oh, yes! yes! It is only you I am alarmed for. It is much better I should be killed than you."

"Killed! I never had better fun in my life. It was glorious. I stuck to him, and hit—there, I have not had anything I could hit as hard as I wanted to, since I used to fight with my cousin Jack at Eton. Oh, Miss Vizard, it was a whirl of Elysium. But I am sorry you were frightened. Let me take you home."

"Oh yes, but not that way; that is the way the monster went?" quivered Zoe.

"Oh, he has had enough of us."

"But I have had too much of him. Take me some other road—a hundred miles round. How I tremble!"

"So you do. Take my arm. No, putting the tips of your fingers on it is no use; take it really—you want support. Be courageous, now—we are very near home."

Zoe trembled, and cried a little, to conclude the incident, but walked bravely home on Uxmoor's arm.

In the hall at Somerville Villa she saw him change colour, and insisted on his taking some port wine.

"I shall be very glad," said he.

A decanter was brought. He filled a large tumbler and drank it off like water.

This was the first intimation he gave Zoe that he was in pain, and his nerves hard tried; nor did she indeed arrive at that conclusion until he had left her.

Of course she carried all this to Aunt Maitland. That lady was quite moved by the adventure. She sat up in bed, and listened with excitement and admiration. She descanted on Lord Uxmoor's courage and chivalry, and congratulated Zoe that such a pearl of manhood had fallen at her feet. "Why, child," said she, "surely, after this, you will not hesitate between this gentleman and a beggarly adventurer who has nothing, not even the courage of a man.

Turn your back on all such rubbish, and be the queen of the county. I'd be content to die to-morrow if I could see you Countess of Uxmoor."

"You shall live and see it, dear aunt," said Zoe, kissing her.

"Well," said Miss Maitland, "if anything can cure me, that will. And really," said she, "I feel better ever since that brave fellow began to bring you to your senses."

Admiration and gratitude being now added to esteem, Zoe received Lord Uxmoor next day with a certain timidity and half-tenderness she had never shown before; and as he was by nature a rapid wooer, he saw his chance, and stayed much longer than usual; and, at last, hazarded a hope that he might be allowed to try and win her heart.

Thereupon she began to fence, and say that love was all folly. He had her esteem and her gratitude, and it would be better for both of them to confine their sentiments within those rational bounds.

"That I cannot do," said Uxmoor; "so I must ask your leave to be ambitious. Let me try and conquer your affection."

"As you conquered the bull?"

"Yes; only not so rudely, nor so quickly, I'll be bound."

"Well, I don't know why I should object. I esteem you more than anybody in the world. You are my beau-ideal of a man. If you can *make* me love you, all the better for me. Only, I am afraid you cannot."

"May I try?"

"Yes," said Zoe, blushing carnation.

"May I come every day?"

"Twice a day, if you like."

"I think I shall succeed—in time."

"I hope you may."

Then he kissed her hand devotedly—the first time in his life—and went away on wings.

Zoe flew up to her Aunt Maitland, flushed and agitated. "Aunt, I'm as good as engaged to him. I have said such unguarded things. I'm sure *he* will understand it that I consent to receive his addresses as my lover. Not that I really said so."

"I hope," said Aunt Maitland, "that you have committed yourself somehow or other, and cannot go back."

"I think I have. Yes; it is all over. I cannot go back now."

Then she burst out crying. Then she was near choking, and had to smell her aunt's salts, while still the tears ran fast.

Miss Maitland received this with perfect composure. She looked on them as the last tears of regret given to a foolish attachment at the moment of condemning it for ever. She was old, and had seen these final tears shed by more than one loving woman, just before entering on her day of sunshine.

And now Zoe must be alone, and vent her swelling heart. She tied a handkerchief round her head, and darted into the garden. She went round and round it, with fleet foot and beating pulses.

The sun began to decline, and a cold wind to warn her in. She came, for the last time, to a certain turn of the gravel walk, where there was a little iron gate leading into the wooded walk from the meadows.

At that gate she found a man. She started back, and leaned against the nearest tree, with her hands behind her.

It was Edward Severne—all in black, and pale as death; but not paler than her own face turned in a moment.

Indeed, they looked at each other, like two ghosts.

CHAPTER XXVI

Zoe was the first to speak, or rather to gasp. "Why do you come here?"

"Because *you* are here."

"And how dare you come where I am?—now your falsehood is found out and flung into my very face!"

"I have never been false to you. At this moment I suffer for my fidelity."

"*You* suffer! I am glad of it. How?"

"In many ways; but they are all light compared with my fear of losing your love."

"I will listen to no idle words," said Zoe sternly. "A lady claimed you before my face. Why did you not stand firm like a man and say, 'You have no claim on me now; I have

a right to love another, and I do?' Why did you fly?—because you were guilty."

"No," said he doggedly. "Surprised, and confounded; but not guilty. Fool!—idiot!—that I was. I lost my head entirely. Yes, it is hopeless. You *must* despise me. You have a right to despise me."

"Don't tell me," said Zoe; "you never lose your head. You are always self-possessed and artful. Would to heaven I had never seen you!" She was violent.

He gave her time. "Zoe," said he, after a while, "if I had not lost my head, should I have ill-treated a lady, and nearly killed her?"

"Ah!" said Zoe sharply, "that is what you have been suffering from—remorse. And well you may. You ought to go back to her, and ask her pardon on your knees. Indeed it is all you have left to do now."

"I know I ought."

"Then do what you ought. Good-bye."

"I cannot. I hate her."

"What! because you have broken her heart, and nearly killed her?"

"No; but because she has come between me and the only woman I ever really loved, or ever can."

"She would not have done that if you had not given her the right. I see her now; she looked justice, and you looked guilt. Words are idle, when I can see her face before me still. No woman could look like that who was in the wrong. But you—guilt made you a coward; you were false to her, and false to me, and so you ran away from us both. You would have talked either of us over alone; but we were together: so you ran away. You have found me alone now, so you are brave again; but it is too late. I am undeceived. I decline to rob Mademoiselle Klosking of her lover; so good-bye."

And this time she was really going, but he stopped her. "At least don't go with a falsehood on your lips," said he coldly.

"A falsehood!—Me!"

"Yes, it is a falsehood. How can you pretend I left that lady for you, when you know my connection with her had entirely ceased ten months before I ever saw your face?"

This staggered Zoe a moment; so did the heat and sense of injustice he threw into his voice.

"I forgot that," said she naïvely; then, recovering herself, "you may have parted with her; but it does not follow that she consented. Fickle men desert constant women. It is done every day."

"You are mistaken again," said he. "When I first saw you, I had ceased to think of Mademoiselle Klosking; but it was not so when I first left her. I did not desert her; I tore myself from her. I had a great affection for her."

"You dare to tell me that. Well, at all events, it is the truth. Why did you leave her, then?"

"Out of self-respect. I was poor—she was rich, and admired. Men sent her bouquets, and bracelets, and flattered her behind the scenes, and I was lowered in my own eyes; so I left her. I was unhappy for a time; but I had my pride to support me, and the wound was healed long before I knew what it was to love, really to love."

There was nothing here that Zoe could contradict. She kept silence and was mystified.

Then she attacked him on another quarter. "Have you written to her since you behaved like a ruffian to her?"

"No; and I never will, come what may. It is wicked of me; but I hate her. I am compelled to esteem her; but I hate her."

Zoe could quite understand that; but in spite of that she said, "Of course you do. Men always hate those they have used ill. Why did you not write to *me?* Had a mind to be impartial, I suppose?"

"I had reason to believe it would have been intercepted."

"For shame! Vizard is incapable of such a thing."

"Ah, you don't know how he is changed. He looks on me as a mad dog. Consider, Zoe; do pray take the real key to it all. He is in love with Mademoiselle Klosking, madly in love with her; and I have been so unfortunate as to injure her, nearly to kill her. I daresay he thinks it is on your account he hates me; but men deceive themselves. It is for *her* he hates me."

"Oh!"

"Ay. Think for a moment and you will see it is. *You* are not in his confidence. I am sure he has never told *you* that he ordered his keepers to shoot me down if I came about the house at night."

"Oh no, no!" cried Zoe.

"Do you know he has raised the country against me, and has warrants out against me for forgery, because I was taken

in by a rogue who gave me bills with sham names on them, and I got Vizard to cash them? As soon as we found out how I had been tricked, my uncle and I offered at once to pay him back his money. But no! he prefers to keep the bills, as a weapon."

Zoe began to be puzzled a little. But she said, "You have been a long time discovering all these grievances. Why have you held no communication all this time?"

"Because you were inaccessible. Does not your own heart tell you that I have been all these weeks trying to communicate, and unable? Why, I came three times under your window, at night, and you never, never would look out."

"I did look out ever so often."

"If I had been you I should have looked ten thousand times. I only left off coming when I heard the keepers were ordered to shoot me down. Not that I should have cared much; for I am desperate. But I had just sense enough left to see that, if my dead body had been brought bleeding into your hall some night, none of you would ever have been happy again. Your eyes would have been opened, all of you. Well, Zoe, you left Vizard Court—that I learned; but it was only this morning I could find out where you were gone; and you see I am here—with a price upon my head. Please read Vizard's advertisements."

She took them, and read them. A hot flush mounted to her cheek.

"You see," said he, "I am to be imprisoned if I set my foot in Barfordshire. Well, it will be false imprisonment, and Mademoiselle Klosking's lover will smart for it. At all events, I shall take no orders but from you. You have been deceived by appearances. I shall do all I can to undeceive you; and, if I cannot, there will be no need to imprison me for a deceit of which I was the victim, nor to shoot me like a dog for loving *you*. I will take my broken heart quietly away, and leave Barfordshire, and England, and the world, for ought I care."

Then he cried; and that made her cry directly.

"Ah!" she sighed, "we are unfortunate. Appearances are so deceitful. I see I have judged too hastily, and listened too little to my own heart, that always made excuses. But it is too late now."

"Why too late?"

"It is."

"But why?"

"It all looked so ugly, and you were silent. We are unfortunate. My brother would never let us marry; and besides—— Oh, why did you not come before?"

"I might as well say, why did you not look out of your window? You could have done it without risking your life, as I did. Or why did you not advertise? You might have invited an explanation from 'E. S.,' under cover to so-and-so."

"Ladies never think of such things. You know that very well."

"Oh, I don't complain; but I do say that those who love should not be ready to reproach; they should put a generous construction. You might have known, and you ought to have known, that I was struggling to find you, and torn with anguish at my impotence."

"No, no. I am so young and inexperienced, and all my friends against you. It is they who have parted us."

"How can they part us, if you love me still as I love you?"

"Because for the last fortnight I have not loved you, but hated you, and doubted you, and thought my only chance of happiness was to imitate your indifference; and whilst I was thinking so, another person has come forward—one whom I have always esteemed; and now, in my pity and despair, I have given him hopes." She hid her burning face in her hands.

"I see; you are false to me, and therefore you have suspected me of being false to you."

At that she raised her head high directly. "Edward, you are unjust. Look in my face and you may see what I have suffered, before I could bring myself to condemn you."

"What! your paleness, that dark rim under your lovely eyes—am I the cause?"

"Indeed you are. But I forgive you. You are sadly pale and worn too. Oh, how unfortunate we are!"

"Do not cry, dearest," said he; "do not despair. Be calm, and let me know the worst. I will not reproach you, though you have reproached me. I love you as no woman can love. Come, tell me."

"Then the truth is, Lord Uxmoor has renewed his attention to me."

"Ah!"

"He has been here every day."

Severne groaned.

"Aunt Maitland was on his side, and spoke so kindly to me; and he saved my life from a furious bull. He is brave, noble, good, and he loves me. I have committed myself. I cannot draw back with honour."

"But from me you can, because I am poor, and hated, and have no title. If you are committed to him, you are engaged to me."

"I am; so now I can go neither way. If I had poison I would take it this moment, and end all."

"For God's sake, don't talk so! I am sure you exaggerate. You cannot, in these few days, have pledged your faith to another. Let me see your finger. Ah! there's my ring on it still; bless you, my own darling Zoe—bless you!" and he covered her hand with kisses, and bedewed it with his ever-ready tears.

The girl began to melt, and all power to ooze out of her, mind and body. She sighed deeply and said, "What can I do—I don't say with honour and credit, but with decency—what *can* I do?"

"Tell me, first, what you have said to him that you consider so compromising."

Zoe, with many sighs, replied, "I believe—I said—I was unhappy. And so I was. And I owned—that I admired—and esteemed him. And so I do. And then, of course, he wanted more, and I could not give more; and he asked might he try and *make* me love him; and—I said—I am afraid I said—he might, if he could."

"And a very proper answer too."

"Ah! but I said he might come every day. It is idle to deceive ourselves. I have encouraged his addresses. I can do nothing now with credit, but die, or go into a convent."

"When did he say this?"

"This very day."

"Then he has never acted on it."

"No, but he will. He will be here to-morrow, for certain."

"Then your course is plain. You must choose to-night between him and me. You must dismiss him, by letter, or me upon the spot. I have not much fortune to offer you, and no coronet; but I love you, and you have seen me reject a lovely and accomplished woman, whom I esteem as much

as you do this lord. Reject him! Why, you have seen me fling her away from me like a dog, sooner than leave you in a moment's doubt of my love. If you cannot write a civil note declining an earl for me, your love is not worthy of mine, and I will begone with my love. I will not take it to Mademoiselle Klosking, though I esteem her as you do this lord; but, at all events, I will take it away from you, and leave you my curse instead, for a false, fickle girl, that could not wait one little month, but must fall, with her engaged ring on her finger, into another man's arms. Oh, Zoe! Zoe! who could have believed this of you?"

"Don't reproach *me*. I won't bear it," she cried wildly.

"I hope not to have to reproach you," said he firmly; "I cannot conceive your hesitating."

"I am worn out. Love has been too great a torment. Oh, if I could find peace!"

Again her tears flowed.

He put on a sympathising air. "You shall have peace. Dismiss *him* as I tell you, and he will trouble you no more; shake hands with me, and say you prefer *him*, and I will trouble you no more. But with two lovers, peace is out of the question, and so is self-respect. I know I could not vacillate between you and Mademoiselle Klosking, or any other woman."

"Ah, Edward, if I do this, you ought to love me very dearly!"

"I shall. Better than ever—if possible."

"And never make me jealous again."

"I never shall, dearest. Our troubles are over."

"Edward, I have been very unhappy. I could not bear these doubts again."

"You shall never be unhappy again."

"I must do what you require, I suppose. That is how it always ends; oh dear! oh dear!"

"Zoe, it must be done; you know it must."

"I warn you I shall do it as kindly as I can."

"Of course you will; you ought to."

"I must go in now; I feel very cold."

"How soon to-morrow will you meet me here?"

"When you please," said she languidly.

"At ten o'clock?"

"Yes."

Then there was a tender parting, and Zoe went slowly in. She went to her own room, just to think it all over

alone. She caught sight of her face in the glass. Her cheeks had regained colour, and her eyes were bright as stars. She stopped and looked at herself. "There now," said she, "and I seem to myself to live again. I was mad to think I could ever love any man but him. He is my darling, my idol."

There was no late dinner at Somerville Villa. Indeed ladies, left to themselves, seldom dine late. Nature is strong in them, and they are hungriest when the sun is high. At seven o'clock Zoe Vizard was seated at her desk trying to write to Lord Uxmoor. She sighed, she moaned, she began, and dropped the pen and hid her face. She became almost wild; and in that state she at last dashed off what follows:—

"Dear Lord Uxmoor,—For pity's sake forgive the mad words I said to you to-day. It is impossible. I can do no more than admire and esteem you. My heart is gone from me for ever. Pray forgive me, though I do not deserve it; and never see me nor look at me again. I ask pardon for my vacillation. It has been disgraceful; but it has ended, and I was under a great error, which I cannot explain to you, when I led you to believe I had a heart to give you. My eyes are opened. Our paths lie asunder. Pray, pray, forgive me, if it is possible. I will never forgive myself, nor cease to bless and revere you, whom I have used so ill. Zoe Vizard."

That day Uxmoor dined alone with his mother for a wonder, and he told her how Miss Vizard had come round; he told her also about the bull, but so vilely that she hardly comprehended he had been in any danger. These encounters are rarely described to the life, except by us who avoid them —except on paper.

Lady Uxmoor was much pleased. She was a proud politic lady, and this was a judicious union of two powerful houses in the county, and one that would almost command the elections. But, above all, she knew her son's heart was in the match, and she gave him a mother's sympathy.

As she retired she kissed him and said, "When you are quite sure of the prize, tell me, and I will call upon her."

Being alone, Lord Uxmoor lighted a cigar, and smoked it in measureless content. The servant brought him a note on a salver. It had come by hand. Uxmoor opened it, and read

every word straight through, down to "Zoe Vizard;" read it, and sat petrified.

He read it again. He felt a sort of sickness come over him. He swallowed a tumbler of port, a wine he rarely touched; but he felt worse now than after the bull-fight. This done, he rose and stalked like a wounded lion into the drawing-room, which was on the same floor, and laid the letter before his mother.

"You are a woman too," said he, a little helplessly. "Tell me—what on earth does this mean?"

The dowager read it slowly and keenly and said, "It means—another man."

"Ah!" said Uxmoor, with a sort of snarl.

"Have you seen any one about her?"

"No; not lately. At Vizard Court there was; but that is all over now, I conclude. It was a Mr. Severne, an adventurer, a fellow that was caught out in a lie before us all. Vizard tells me a lady came and claimed him before Miss Vizard, and he ran away."

"An unworthy attachment, in short?"

"Very unworthy, if it was an attachment at all."

"Was he at Vizard Court when she declined your hand?"

"Yes."

"Did he remain, after you went?"

"I suppose so. Yes, he must have."

"Then the whole thing is clear; that man has come forward again unexpectedly, or written, and she dismisses you. My darling, there is but one thing for you to do. Leave her, and thank her for telling you in time. A less honourable fool would have hidden it, and then we might have had a Countess of Uxmoor in the Divorce Court some day or other."

"I had better go abroad," said Uxmoor, with a groan. "This country is poisoned for me."

"Go, by all means. Let Janneway pack up your things to-morrow."

"I should like to kill that fellow first."

"You will not even waste a thought on him, if you are my son."

"You are right, mother. What am I to say to her?"

"Not a word."

"What! not answer her letter? It is humble enough, I am sure—poor soul! Mother, I am wretched, but I am not bitter, and my rival will revenge me."

"Uxmoor, your going abroad is the only answer she shall have. The wisest man, in these matters, who ever lived, has left a rule of conduct to every well-born man—a rule which, believe me, is wisdom itself:—

> 'Le bruit est pour le fat, la plainte est pour le sot;
> L'honnête homme trompé s'éloigne, et ne dit mot.'

You will make a tour, and not say a word to Miss Vizard, good, bad, or indifferent. I insist upon that."

"Very well. Thank you, dear mother. You guide me, and don't let me make a fool of myself; for I am terribly cut up. You will be the only Countess of Uxmoor in my day."

Then he kneeled at her feet, and she kissed his head, and cried over him; but her tears only made this proud lady stronger.

Next day he started on his travels.

Now, but for Zoe, he would on no account have left England just then; for he was going to build model cottages in his own village, upon designs of his own, each with a little plot, and a public warehouse or granary, with divisions for their potatoes and apples, &c. However, he turned this over in his mind while he was packing; he placed certain plans and papers in his despatch-box, and took his ticket to Taddington, instead of going at once to London. From Taddington he drove over to Hillstoke, and asked for Miss Gale. They told him she was fixed at Vizard Court. That vexed him; he did not want to meet Vizard. He thought it the part of a Jerry Sneak to go and howl to a brother against his sister. Yet, if Vizard questioned him, how could he conceal there was something wrong? However, he went down to Vizard Court; but said to the servant who opened the door, "I am rather in a hurry, sir; do you think that you could procure me a few minutes with Miss Gale? You need not trouble Mr. Vizard."

"Yes, my laud. Certainly, my laud. Please step in the morning-room, my laud. Mr. Vizard is out."

That was fortunate, and Miss Gale came down to him directly.

Fanny took that opportunity to chatter and tell Mademoiselle Klosking all about Lord Uxmoor and his passion for Zoe. "And he will have her, too," said she boldly.

Lord Uxmoor told Miss Gale he had called upon business.

He was obliged to leave home for a time, and wished to place his projects under the care of a person who could really sympathise with them, and make additions to them, if necessary. "Men," said he, "are always making oversights in matters of domestic comfort; besides, you are full of ideas. I want you to be viceroy with full power, and act just as you would if the village belonged to you."

Rhoda coloured high at the compliment.

"Wells, cows, granary, real education—what you like," said he. "I know your mind. Begin abolishing the lower orders in the only way they can be got rid of; by raising them in comfort, cleanliness, decency, and knowledge. Then I shall not be missed. I'm going abroad."

"Going abroad?"

"Yes. Here are my plans: alter them for the better if you can. All the work to be done by the villagers. Weekly wages. We buy materials. They will be more reconciled to improved dwellings when they build them themselves. Here are the addresses of the people who will furnish money. It will entail travelling; but my people will always meet you at the station, if you telegraph from Taddington. You accept? A thousand thanks. I am afraid I must be off."

She went into the hall with him, half bewildered, and only at the door found time to ask after Zoe Vizard.

"A little better, I think, than when she came."

"Does she know you are going abroad?"

"No; I don't think she does, yet. It was settled all in a hurry."

He escaped further questioning by hurrying away.

Miss Gale was still looking after him, when Ina Klosking came down, dressed for a walk, and leaning lightly on Miss Dover's arm. This was by previous consent of Miss Gale.

"Well, dear," said Fanny, "what did he say to you?"

"Something that has surprised and puzzled me very much." She then related the whole conversation, with her usual precision.

Ina Klosking observed quietly to Fanny that this did not look like successful wooing.

"I don't know that," said Fanny stoutly. "Oh, Miss Gale, did you not ask him about her?"

"Certainly I did; and he said she was better than when she first came."

"There!" said Fanny triumphantly.

Miss Gale gave her a little pinch, and she dropped the subject.

Vizard returned, and found Mademoiselle Klosking walking on his gravel. He offered her his arm, and was a happy man, parading her very slowly, and supporting her steps, and purring his congratulations into her ear. "Suppose I were to invite you to dinner, what would you say?"

"I think I should say 'To-morrow.'"

"And a very good answer, too. To-morrow shall be a *fête*."

"You spoil me."

"That is impossible."

It was strange to see them together; he so happy, she so apathetic, yet gracious.

Next morning came a bit of human nature, a letter from Zoe to Fanny, almost entirely occupied with praises of Lord Uxmoor. She told the bull story better than I have—if possible—and, in short, made Uxmoor a hero of romance.

Fanny carried this in triumph to the other ladies, and read it out. "There!" said she. "Didn't I tell you?"

Rhoda read the letter, and owned herself puzzled. "I am not, then," said Fanny; "they are engaged—over the bull; like Europa, and I forget who,—and so he is not afraid to go abroad now. That is just like the men. They cool directly the chase is over."

Now the truth was that Zoe was trying to soothe her conscience with eloquent praises of the man she had dismissed, and felt guilty.

Ina Klosking said little. She was puzzled too at first. She asked to see Zoe's handwriting. The letter was handed to her. See studied the characters. "It is a good hand," she said—"nothing mean there." And she gave it back.

But, with a glance, she had read the address, and learned that the post town was Bagley.

All that day, at intervals, she brought her powerful understanding to bear on the paradox; and though she had not the facts and the clue I have given the reader, she came near the truth in an essential matter. She satisfied herself that Lord Uxmoor was not engaged to Zoe Vizard. Clearly, if so, he would not leave England for months. She resolved to know more; and just before dinner she wrote a line to Ashmead, and requested him to call on her immediately.

That day she dined with Vizard and the ladies. She

sat at Vizard's right hand, and he told her how proud and happy he was to see her there.

She blushed faintly, but made no reply.

She retired soon after dinner.

All next day she expected Ashmead.

He did not come.

She dined with Vizard next day, and retired to the drawing-room. The piano was opened, and she played one or two exquisite things, and afterwards tried her voice, but only in scales, and somewhat timidly, for Miss Gale warned her she might lose it, or spoil it, if she strained the vocal chord while her whole system was weak.

Next day Ashmead came with apologies. He had spent a day in the cathedral town on business. He did not tell her how he had spent that day, going about puffing her as the greatest singer of sacred music in the world, and paving the way for her engagement at the next festival.

Yet the single-hearted Joseph had really raised that commercial superstructure upon the sentiments she had uttered on his first visit to Vizard Court.

Ina now held a private conference with him. "I think," said she, "I have heard you say you were once an actor."

"I was, madam, and a very good one too."

"*Cela va sans dire.* I never knew one that was not. At all events you can disguise yourself."

"Anything, madam, from Grandfather Whitehead to a boy in a pinafore. Famous for my makes-up."

"I wish you to watch a certain house, and not be recognised by a person who knows you."

"Well, madam, nothing is *infra dig.* if done for you; nothing is distasteful if done for you."

"Thank you, my friend. I have thought it well to put my instructions on paper."

"Ah, that is the best way."

She handed him the instructions. He read them, and his eyes sparkled. "Ah! this is a commission I undertake with pleasure, and I'll execute it with zeal."

He left her soon after to carry out these instructions; and that very evening he was in the wardrobe of the little theatre, rummaging out a suitable costume, and also in close conference with the wig-maker.

Next day Vizard had his mother's sables taken out and aired; and drove Mademoiselle Klosking into Taddington

in an open carriage. Fanny told her they were his mother's sables, and none to compare with them in the country.

On returning, she tried her voice to the harmonium in her own ante-chamber, and found it was gaining strength—like herself.

Meantime Zoe Vizard met Severne in the garden, and told him she had written to Lord Uxmoor, and he would never visit her again. But she did not make light of the sacrifice this time. She had sacrificed her own self-respect as well as Uxmoor's, and she was sullen and tearful.

He had to be very wary and patient, or she would have parted with him too, and fled from both of them to her brother.

Uxmoor's wounded pride would have been soothed could he have been present at the first interview of this pair. He would have seen Severne treated with a hauteur and a sort of savageness he himself was safe from, safe in her unshaken esteem.

But the world is made for those who can keep their temper, especially the female part of the world.

Sad, kind and loving, but never irritable, Severne smoothed down, and soothed, and comforted the wounded girl; and seeing her two or three times a day—for she was completely mistress of her time—got her entirely into his power again.

Uxmoor did not reply.

She had made her selection. Love beckoned forward. It was useless to look back.

Love was omnipotent. They both began to recover their good looks as if by magic; and as Severne's passion, though wicked, was earnest, no poor bird was ever more completely entangled by bird-lime than Zoe was caught by Edward Severne.

Their usual place of meeting was the shrubbery attached to Somerville Villa. The trees, being young, made all the closer shade; and the gravel walk meandered, and shut them out from view.

Severne used to enter this shrubbery by a little gate leading from the meadow, and wait under the trees till Zoe came to him. Vizard's advertisements alarmed him, and he used to see the coast clear before he entered the shrubbery, and also before he left it. He was so particular in this, that observing one day an old man doddering about with a basket, he would not go in till he had taken a look at him.

found it was an ancient, white-haired villager gathering mushrooms. The old fellow was so stiff, and his hand so trembling, that it took him about a minute to gather a single fungus.

To give a reason for coming up to him, Severne said, "How old are you, old man?"

"I be ninety, measter, next Martinmas-day."

"Only ninety?" said our Adonis contemptuously; "you look a hundred and ninety."

He would have been less contemptuous had he known that the mushrooms were all toadstools, and the village *centenaire* was Mr. Joseph Ashmead, resuming his original arts, and playing Grandfather Whitehead on the green grass.

CHAPTER XXVII

Mademoiselle Klosking told Vizard the time drew near when she must leave his hospitable house.

"Say a month hence," said he.

She shook her head.

"Of course you will not stay to gratify me," said he, half sadly, half bitterly. "But you will have to stay a week or two longer *par ordonnance du médecin.*"

"My physician is reconciled to my going. We must all bow to necessity."

This was said too firmly to admit a reply.

"The old house will seem very dark again whenever you do go," said Vizard plaintively.

"It will soon be brightened by her who is its true and lasting light," was the steady reply.

A day or two passed with nothing to record, except that Vizard hung about Ina Klosking, and became, if possible, more enamoured of her, and more unwilling to part with her.

Mr. Ashmead arrived one afternoon about three o'clock, and was more than an hour with her. They conversed very earnestly, and when he went, Miss Gale found her agitated.

"This will not do," said she.

"It will pass, my friend," said Ina. "I will sleep."

She laid herself down, and slept three hours before dinner.

She arose refreshed, and dined with the little party; and on retiring to the drawing-room, she invited Vizard to join them at his convenience.

He made it his convenience in ten minutes.

Then she opened the piano, played an introduction, and electrified them all by singing the leading song in "Siebel." She did not sing it so powerfully as in the theatre; she would not have done that even if she could; but still she sang it out, and nobly. It seemed a miracle to hear such singing in a room.

Vizard was in raptures.

They cooled suddenly when she reminded him what he had said, that she must stay till she could sing Siebel's song. "I keep to the letter of the contract," said she. "My friends, this is my last night at Vizard Court."

"Please try and shake that resolution," said Vizard gravely to Mesdemoiselles Dover and Gale.

"They cannot," said Ina. "It is my destiny. And yet," said she, after a pause, "I would not have you remember me by that flimsy thing. Let me sing you a song your mother loved; let me be remembered in this house, as a singer, by that."

Then she sang Handel's song—

> "What though I trace each herb and flower
> That decks the morning dew?
> Did I not own Jehovah's power,
> How vain were all I knew!"

She sang it with amazing purity, volume, grandeur, and power; the lustres rang and shook, the hearts were thrilled, and the very souls of the hearers ravished. She herself turned a little pale in singing it, and the tears stood in her eyes.

The song and its interpretation were so far above what passes for music, that they all felt compliments would be an impertinence. Their eyes and their long-drawn breath paid the true homage to that great master rightly interpreted—a very rare occurrence.

"Ah," said she; "that was the hand could brandish Goliath's spear."

"And this is how you reconcile us to losing you," said Vizard. "You might stay, at least, till you had gone through my poor mother's collection."

"Ah, I wish I could. But I cannot; I must not. My Fate forbids it."

"'Fate' and 'destiny,'" said Vizard; "stuff and nonsense. We make our own destiny. Mine is to be eternally disappointed, and happiness snatched out of my hands."

He had no sooner made this pretty speech than he was ashamed of it, and stalked out of the room, not to say any more unwise things.

This burst of spleen alarmed Fanny Dover. "There," said she, "now you cannot go. He is very angry."

Ina Klosking said she was sorry for that, but he was too just a man to be angry with her long; the day would come when he would approve her conduct. Her lip quivered a little as she said this, and the water stood in her eyes; and this was remembered and understood, long after, both by Miss Dover and Rhoda Gale.

"When does your Royal Highness propose to start?" inquired Rhoda Gale, very obsequiously, and just a little bitterly.

"To-morrow at half-past nine o'clock, dear friend," said Ina.

"Then you will not go without me. You will get the better of Mr. Vizard, because he is only a man; but I am a woman, and have a will as well as you. If you make a journey to-morrow, I go with you. Deny me, and you shan't go at all." Her eyes flashed defiance.

Ina moved one step; took Rhoda's little defiant head, and kissed her cheek. "Sweet physician and kind friend, of course you shall go with me, if you will; and be a great blessing to me."

This reconciled Miss Gale to the proceedings. She packed up a carpet-bag, and was up early, making provisions of every sort for her patient's journey: air-pillows, soft warm coverings, medicaments, stimulants, &c., in a little bag slung across her shoulders. Thus furnished and equipped in a uniform suit of grey cloth and wide-awake hat, she cut a very sprightly and commanding figure, but more like Diana than Hebe.

The Klosking came down, a pale Juno, in travelling costume; and a quarter of an hour before the time, a pair-horse fly was at the door, and Mr Ashmead in the hall.

The ladies were both ready.

But Vizard had not appeared.

This caused an uneasy discussion.

"He must be very angry," said Fanny, in a half whisper.

"I cannot go while he is," sighed La Klosking. "There is a limit even to my courage."

"Mr. Harris," said Rhoda, "would you mind telling Mr. Vizard?"

"Well, Miss," said Harris softly, "I did step in and tell him. Which he told me to go to the devil, Miss; a hobservation I never knew him to make before."

This was not encouraging. Yet the Klosking quietly inquired where he was.

"In there, ma'am," said Harris. "In his study."

Mademoiselle Klosking, placed between two alternatives, decided with her usual resolution. She walked immediately to the door, and tapped at it; then scarcely waiting for an instant, opened it and walked in with seeming firmness, though her heart was beating rather high.

The people outside looked at one another. "I wonder whether he will tell *her* to go to the devil?" said Fanny, who was getting tired of being good.

"No use," said Miss Gale; "she doesn't know the road."

When La Klosking entered the study Vizard was seated disconsolate, with two pictures before him. His face was full of pain, and La Klosking's heart smote her. She moved towards him, hanging her head, and said, with inimitable sweetness and tenderness, "Here is a culprit come to try and appease you."

There came a time when he could hardly think of these words, and her penitent, submissive manner, with dry eyes. But just then his black dog had bitten him; and he said sullenly, "Oh, never mind me; it was always so. Your sex have always made me smart for—— If flying from my house, before you are half recovered, gives you half the pleasure it gives me pain and mortification, say no more about it."

"Ah! why say it gives me pleasure? My friend, you cannot really think so."

"I don't know what to think. You ladies are all riddles."

"Then I must take you into my confidence, and with some reluctance, I own, let you know why I leave this dear, kind roof to-day."

Vizard's generosity took the alarm. "No," he said, "I will not extort your reasons. It is a shame of me. Your bare will ought to be law in this house; and what reasons could reconcile me to losing you so suddenly? You are the joy of our eyes, the delight of our ears, the idol of all

our hearts. You will leave us, and there will be darkness and gloom, instead of sunshine and song. Well, go; but you cannot soften the blow with reasons."

Mademoiselle Klosking flushed, and her bosom heaved; for this was a strong man greatly moved. With instinctive tact she saw the best way to bring him to his senses was to give him a good opening to retreat.

"Ah, Monsieur," said she, "you are *trop grand seigneur.* You entertain a poor wounded singer in a chamber few princes can equal. You place everything at her disposal; such a physician and nurse as no queen can command; a choir to sing to her; royal sables to keep the wind from her, and ladies to wait on her. And, when you have brought her back to life, you say to yourself, She is a woman; she will not be thoroughly content unless we tell her she is adorable. So, out of politeness, you descend to the language of gallantry. This was not needed. I dispense with that kind of comfort. I leave your house because it is my duty, and leave it your grateful servant and true friend to my last hour."

She had opened the door, and Vizard could now escape. His obstinacy and his heart would not let him.

"Do not fence with me," said he. "Leave that to others. It is beneath *you.* If you had been content to stay, I would have been content to show my heart by halves. But when you offer to leave me, you draw from me an avowal I can no longer restrain, and you must and shall listen to it. When I saw you on the stage at Homburg, I admired you, and loved you that very night. But I knew from experience how seldom in women outward graces go with the virtues of the soul. I distrusted my judgment. I feared you, and I fled you. But our destiny brought you here; and when I held you, pale and wounded, in my very arms, my heart seemed to go out of my bosom."

"Oh, no more! no more, pray!" cried Mademoiselle Klosking.

But the current of love was not to be stemmed. "Since that terrible hour I have been in heaven, watching your gradual and sure recovery; but you have recovered only to abandon me, and your hurry to leave me drives me to desperation. No, I cannot part with you. You must not leave me, either this day or any day. Give me your hand, and stay here for ever, and be the queen of my heart and of my house."

For some time La Klosking had lost her usual composure. Her bosom heaved tumultuously, and her hands trembled. But at this distinct proposal the whole woman changed. She drew herself up, with her pale cheek flushing, and her eyes glittering.

"What, sir?" said she. "Have you read me so ill? Do you not know I would rather be the meanest drudge that goes on her knees and scrubs your floors than the queen of your house, as you call it. Ah, Jesu, are all men alike, then; that he whom I have so revered, whose mother's songs I have sung to him, makes me a proposal dishonourable to me and to himself?"

"Dishonourable!" cried Vizard. "Why, what can any man offer to any woman more honourable than I offer you? I offer you my heart and my hand, and I say, do not go, my darling. Stay here for ever, and be my queen, my goddess, my wife!"

"YOUR WIFE?" She stared wildly at him. "Your wife? Am I dreaming, or are you?"

"Neither. Do you think I can be content with less than that? Ina, I adore you."

She put her hand to her head. "I know not who is to blame for this," said she, and she trembled visibly.

"I'll take the blame," said he gaily.

Said Ina, very gravely, "You, who do me the honour to offer me your name, have you asked yourself seriously what has been the nature of my relation with Edward Severne?"

"No!" cried Vizard violently; "and I do not mean to. I see you despise him now; and I have my eyes and my senses to guide me in choosing a wife. I choose you—if you will have me."

She listened, then turned her moist eyes full upon him, and said to him, "This is the greatest honour ever befell me. I cannot take it."

"Not take it?"

"No; but that is my misfortune. Do not be mortified. You have no rival in my esteem. What shall I say, my friend?—at least I may call you that; if I explain now, I shall weep much, and lose my strength. What shall I do? I think—yes, that will be best—*you shall go with me to-day.*"

"To the end of the world!"

"Something tells me you will know all, and forgive me."

"Shall I take my bag?"

"You might take an evening dress, and some linen."

"Very well. I won't keep you a moment," said he; and went upstairs with great alacrity.

She went into the hall, with her eyes bent on the ground, and was immediately pinned by Rhoda Gale, whose piercing eye, and inquisitive finger on her pulse, soon discovered that she had gone through a trying scene. "This is a bad beginning of an imprudent journey," said she; "I have a great mind to countermand the carriage."

"No, no," said Ina; "I will sleep in the railway and recover myself."

The ladies now got into the carriage; Ashmead insisted on going upon the box; and Vizard soon appeared, and took his seat opposite Miss Gale and Mademoiselle Klosking. The latter whispered her doctress: "It would be wise of me not to speak much at present." La Gale communicated this to Vizard, and they drove along in dead silence. But they were naturally curious to know where they were going; so they held some communication with their eyes. They very soon found they were going to Taddington station.

Then came a doubt—were they going up or down?

That was soon resolved.

Mr. Ashmead had hired a saloon carriage for them, with couches and conveniences.

They entered it; and Mademoiselle Klosking said to Miss Gale, "It is necessary that I should sleep."

"You shall," said Miss Gale.

While she was arranging the pillows and things, La Klosking said to Vizard, "We artists learn to sleep when we have work to do. Without it I should not be strong enough this day." She said this in a half-apologetic tone, as one anxious not to give him any shadow of offence.

She was asleep in five minutes; and Miss Gale sat watching her at first, but presently joined Vizard at the other end, and they whispered together. Said she, "What becomes of the theory that women have no strength of will? There is Mademoiselle *Je le veux* in person. When she wants to sleep, she sleeps; and look at you and me—do you know where we are going?"

"No."

"No more do I. The motive-power is that personification of divine repose there. How beautiful she is with her sweet

lips parted, and her white teeth peeping, and her upper and lower lashes wedded! and how graceful!"

"She is a goddess," said Vizard; "I wish I had never seen her. Mark my words, she will give me the sorest heart of all."

"I hope not," said Rhoda, very seriously.

Ina slept sweetly for nearly two hours, and all that time her friends could only guess where they were going.

At last the train stopped, for the sixth time, and Ashmead open the door.

This worthy, who was entirely in command of the expedition, collected the luggage, including Vizard's bag, and deposited it at the station. He then introduced the party to a pair-horse fly, and mounted the box.

When they stopped at Bagley Vizard suspected where they were going.

When he saw the direction the carriage took, he knew it, and turned very grave indeed.

He even regretted that he had put himself so blindly under the control of a woman. He cast searching glances at Mademoiselle Klosking to try and discover what on earth she was going to do. But her face was as impenetrable as marble. Still she never looked less likely to do anything rash or in bad taste. Quietness was the main characteristic of her face when not rippled over by a ravishing sweetness; but he had never seen her look so great, and lofty, and resolute as she looked now; a little stern, too, as one who had a great duty to do, and was inflexible as iron. When truly feminine features stiffen into marble like this, beauty is indeed imperial, and worthy of epic song; it rises beyond the wing of prose.

My reader is too intelligent not to divine that she was steeling herself to a terrible interview with Zoe Vizard—terrible, mainly on account of the anguish she knew she must inflict.

But we can rarely carry out our plans exactly as we trace them—unexpected circumstances derange them or expand them; and I will so far anticipate as to say that, in this case, a most unexpected turn of events took La Klosking by surprise.

Whether she proved equal to the occasion these pages will show very soon.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Poikilus never left Taddington, only the "Swan." More than once he was within sight of Ashmead, unobserved. Once, indeed, that gentleman, who had a great respect for dignitaries, saluted him; for at that moment Poikilus happened to be a sleek dignitary of the Church of England. Poikilus, when quite himself, wore a moustache, and was sallow and lean as a weasel; but he shaved, and stuffed, and coloured for the dean. Shovel-hat, portly walk, and green spectacles did the rest. Grandfather Whitehead saluted. His reverence chuckled.

Poikilus kept Severne posted by letter and wire, as to many things that happened outside Vizard Court; but he could not divine the storm that was brewing inside Ina Klosking's room. Yet Severne defended himself exactly as he would have done had he known all. He and Zoe spent Elysian hours, meeting twice a day in the shrubbery, and making love as if they were the only two creatures in the world; but it was blind Elysium only to one of them—Severne was uneasy and alarmed the whole time. His sagacity showed him it could not last, and there was always a creeping terror on him. Would not Uxmoor cause inquiries? Would he not be sure to tell Vizard? Would not Vizard come there to look after Zoe, or order her back to Vizard Court? Would not the Klosking get well, and interfere once more? He passed the time between heaven and hell; whenever he was not under the immediate spell of Zoe's presence, a sort of vague terror was always on him. He looked all round him wherever he went.

This terror, and his passion, which was now as violent as it was wicked, soon drove him to conceive desperate measures. But, by masterly self-government, he kept them two days to his own bosom. He felt it was too soon to raise a fresh and painful discussion with Zoe. He must let her drink unmixed delight, and get a taste for it; and then show her on what conditions alone it could be had for ever.

It was on the third day after their reconciliation she found him seated on a bench in the shrubbery, lost in thought, and looking very dejected. She was close to him before he

noticed; then he sprang up, stared at her, and began to kiss her hands violently, and even her very dress.

"It is you," said he, "once more."

"Yes, dear," said Zoe tenderly; "did you think I would not come?"

"I did not know whether you could come. I feel that my happiness cannot last long. And, Zoe dear, I have had a dream. I dreamed we were taken prisoners, and carried to Vizard Court, and on the steps stood Vizard and Mademoiselle Klosking, arm in arm; I believe they were man and wife. And you were taken out and led, weeping, into the house, and I was left there raging with agony. And then that lady put out her finger in a commanding way, and I was whirled away into utter darkness, and I heard you moan, and I fought, and dashed my head against the carriage, and I felt my heart burst, and my whole body filled with some cold liquid, and I went to sleep, and I heard a voice say, 'It is all over; his trouble is ended.' I was dead."

This narrative, and his deep dejection, set Zoe's tears flowing. "Poor Edward!" she sighed; "I would not survive you. But cheer up, dear; it was only a dream. We are not slaves. I am not dependent on any one. How can we be parted?"

"We shall, unless we use our opportunity, and make it impossible to part us. Zoe, do not slight my alarm and my misgivings; such warnings are prophetic. For heaven's sake, make one sacrifice more, and let us place our happiness beyond the reach of man."

"Only tell me how."

"There is but one way—marriage."

Zoe blushed high, and panted a little, but said nothing.

"Ah!" said he piteously, "I ask too much."

"How can you say that?" said Zoe. "Of course I shall marry you, dearest. What! do you think I could do what I *have* done, for anybody but my husband that is to be?"

"I was mad to think otherwise," said he; "but I am in low spirits, and full of misgivings. Oh, the comfort, the bliss, the peace of mind, the joy, if you would see our hazardous condition, and make all safe, by marrying me to-morrow!"

"To-morrow! Why, Edward, are you mad? How can we be married, so long as my brother is so prejudiced against you?"

"If we wait his consent, we are parted for ever. He would forgive us after it—that is certain; but he would never consent. He is too much under the influence of his—of Mademoiselle Klosking."

"Indeed I cannot hope he will consent beforehand," sighed Zoe; "but I have not the courage to defy him; and if I had, we could not marry all in a moment, like that. We should have to be cried in church."

"That is quite gone out, amongst ladies and gentlemen."

"Not in our family. Besides, even a special licence takes time, I suppose. Oh, no, I could not be married in a clandestine, discreditable way. I am a Vizard,—please remember that. Would you degrade the woman you honour with your choice?"

And her red cheeks and flashing eyes warned him to desist.

"God forbid!" said he. "If that is the alternative, I consent to lose her—and lose her I shall."

He then affected to dismiss the subject, and said, "Let me enjoy the hours that are left me. Much misery, or much bliss, can be condensed in a few days. I will enjoy the blessed time; and we will wait for the chapter of accidents that is sure to part us." Then he acted reckless happiness, and broke down at last.

She cried, but showed no sign of yielding. Her pride and self-respect were roused and on their defence.

The next day he came to her quietly sad. He seemed languid and listless, and to care for nothing. He was artful enough to tell her, on the information of Poikilus, that Vizard had hired the cathedral choir three times a week, to sing to his inamorata; and that he had driven her about Taddington, dressed, like a duchess, in a whole suit of sables.

At that word the girl turned pale.

He observed, and continued: "And it seems these sables are known throughout the county. There were several carriages in the town, and my informant heard a lady say they were Mrs. Vizard's sables, worth five hundred guineas,—a Russian princess gave them her."

"It is quite true," said Zoe. "His mother's sables! Is it possible?"

"They all say he is caught at last, and this is to be the next Mrs. Vizard."

"They may well say so, if he parades her in his mother's sables," said Zoe, and could not conceal her jealousy and her indignation. "I never dared so much as ask his permission to wear them," said she.

"And if you had, he would have told you the relics of a saint were not to be played with."

"That is just what he would have said, I do believe." The female heart was stung.

"Ah, well," said Severne, "I am sure I should not grudge him his happiness, if you would see things as he does, and be as brave as he is."

"Thank you," said Zoe. "Women cannot defy the world, as men do." Then passionately, "Why do you torment me so? why do you urge me so? a poor girl, all alone, and far from advice. What on earth would you have me do?"

"Secure us against another separation,—unite us in bliss for ever."

"And so I would if I could; you know I would. But it is impossible."

"No, Zoe; it is easy. There are two ways. We can reach Scotland in eight hours; and there, by a simple writing, and declaration before witnesses, we are man and wife."

"A Gretna Green marriage?"

"It is just as much a legal marriage as if a bishop married us at St. Paul's. However, we could follow it up immediately by marriage in a church, either in Scotland or the north of England. But there is another way. We can be married at Bagley, any day, before the registrar."

"Is that a marriage? a real marriage?"

"As real, as legal, as binding, as a wedding in St. Paul's."

"Nobody in this county has ever been married so. I should blush to be seen about after it."

"Our first happy year would not be passed in this country. We should go abroad for six months."

"Ay, fly from shame."

"On our return, we should be received with open arms by my own people in Huntingdonshire, until your people came round, as they always do."

He then showed her a letter, in which his pearl of a cousin said they would receive his wife with open arms, and make her as happy as they could. Uncle Tom was coming home

from India, with two hundred thousand pounds; he was a confirmed old bachelor, and Edward his favourite, &c.

Zoe faltered a little; so then he pressed her hard with love, and entreaties, and promises, and even hysterical tears; then she began to cry,—a sure sign of yielding. "Give me time," she said; "give me time."

He groaned, and said there was no time to lose; otherwise he never would have urged her so.

For all that, she could not be drawn to a decision. She must think over such a step.

Next morning, at the usual time, he came to know his fate. But she did not appear. He waited an hour for her. She did not come. He began to rage and storm, and curse his folly for driving her so hard.

At last she came, and found him pale with anxiety, and looking utterly miserable. She told him she had passed a sleepless night, and her head had ached so in the morning, she could not move.

"My poor darling!" said he, "and I am the cause. Say no more about it, dear one. I see you do not love me as I love you, and I forgive you."

She smiled sadly at that, for she was surer of her own love than his.

Zoe had passed a night of torment and vacillation; and but for her brother having paraded Mademoiselle Klosking in his mother's sables, she would, I think, have held out. But this turned her a little against her brother; and as he was the main obstacle to her union with Severne, love and pity conquered. Yet still honour and pride had their say. "Edward," said she, "I love you with all my heart, and share your fears that accident may separate us. I will let you decide for both of us. But before you decide, be warned of one thing. I am a girl no longer, but a woman, who has been distracted with many passions. If any slur rests on my fair name, deeply as I love you now, I shall abhor you then."

He turned pale, for her eye flashed dismay into his craven soul.

He said nothing, and she continued: "If you insist on this hasty, half-clandestine marriage, then I consent to this—I will go with you before the registrar, and I shall come back here directly. Next morning early we will start for Scotland, and be married that other way before witnesses. Then your fears will be at an end, for you believe in these marriages;

only, as I do not,—for I look on these *legal* marriages merely as solemn betrothals,—I shall be Miss Zoe Vizard, and expect you to treat me so, until I have been married in a church, like a lady."

"Of course you shall," said he, and overwhelmed her with expressions of gratitude, respect, and affection.

This soothed her troubled mind, and she let him take her hand, and pour his honied flatteries into her ear, as he walked her slowly up and down.

She could hardly tear herself away from the soft pressure of his hand and the fascination of his tongue, and she left him, more madly in love with him than ever, and ready to face anything but dishonour for him. She was to come out at twelve o'clock, and walk into Bagley with him to betroth herself to him, as she chose to consider it, before the stipendiary magistrate, who married couples in that way. Of the two marriages she had consented to, merely as preliminaries to a real marriage, Zoe despised this the most; for the Scotch marriage was, at all events, ancient, and respectable lovers had been driven to it again and again.

She was behind her time, and Severne thought her courage had failed her after all; but no, at half-past twelve she came out, and walked briskly towards Bagley.

He was behind her, and followed her. She took his arm nervously. "Let me feel you all the way," she said, "to give me courage."

So they walked arm in arm; and as they went, his courage secretly wavered, hers rose at every step.

About half a mile from the town they met a carriage and pair.

At sight of them a gentleman on the box tapped at the glass window and said hurriedly, "Here they are *together*."

Mademoiselle Klosking said, "Stop the carriage;" then, pausing a little, "Mr. Vizard—on your word of honour, no violence."

The carriage was drawn up, Ashmead opened the door in a trice, and La Klosking, followed by Vizard, stepped out, and stood like a statue before Edward Severne and Zoe Vizard.

Severne dropped her arm directly, and was panic-stricken.

Zoe uttered a little scream at the sight of Vizard; but the next moment took fire at her rival's audacity, and stepped boldly before her lover with flashing eyes and expanding nostrils that literally breathed defiance.

CHAPTER XXIX

"You infernal scoundrel!" roared Vizard, and took a stride towards Severne.

"No violence," said Ina Klosking sternly: "it will be an insult to this lady, and me."

"Very well then," said Vizard grimly. "I must wait till I catch him alone."

"Meantime, permit me to speak, sir," said Ina. "Believe me, I have a better right than even you."

"Then, pray, ask my sister why I find her on that villain's arm."

"I should not answer her," said Zoe haughtily. "But my brother I will. Harrington, all this vulgar abuse confirms me in my choice. I take his arm, because I have accepted his hand. I am going into Bagley with him to become his wife."

This announcement took away Vizard's breath for a moment, and Ina Klosking put in her word. "You cannot do that; pray be warned. He is leading you to infamy."

"Infamy! What! because he cannot give me a suit of sables? Infamy! because we prefer virtuous poverty to vice and wealth?"

"No, young lady," said Ina, colouring faintly at the taunt; "but because you could only be his paramour—not his wife. He is married already."

At these words, spoken with that power Ina Klosking could always command, Zoe Vizard turned ashy pale. But she fought on bravely. "Married? It is false! To whom?"

"To me."

"I thought so. Now I know it is not true. He left you months before we ever knew him."

"Look at him. He does not say it is false."

Zoe turned on Severne, and at his face her own heart quaked. "Are you married to this lady?" she asked; and her eyes, dilated to their full size, searched his every feature.

"Not that I know of," said he impudently.

"Is that the serious answer you expected, Miss Vizard?" said Ina keenly; then to Severne, "You are unwise to insult the woman on whom, from this day, you must depend for

bread. Miss Vizard, to you I speak, and not to this shameless man. For your mother's sake do me justice. I have loved him dearly; but now I abhor him. Would I could break the tie that binds us, and give him to you or to any lady who would have him. But I cannot. And shall I hold my tongue, and let you be ruined and dishonoured? I am an older woman than you, and bound by gratitude to all your house. Dear lady, I have taxed my strength to save you. I feel that strength waning. Pray read this paper — and consent to save *yourself.*"

"I will read it," said Rhoda Gale, interfering. "I know German. It is an authorised duplicate certifying the marriage of Edward Severne of Willingham in Huntingdonshire, England, to Ina Ferris, daughter of Walter Ferris and Eva Klosking, of Zutzig, in Denmark. The marriage was solemnised at Berlin, and here are the signatures of several witnesses: Eva Klosking; Fräulein Graafe; Zug, the Capellmeister; Vicomte Meurice, French *attaché;* Count Hompesch, Bavarian plenipotentiary; Herr Formes."

Ina explained, in a voice that was now feeble, "I was a public character; my marriage was public; not like the clandestine union which is all he dared offer to this well-born lady."

"The Bavarian and French ministers are both in London," said Vizard eagerly. "We can easily learn if these signatures are forged, like *your* acceptances."

But if one shadow of doubt remained, Severne now removed it; he uttered a scream of agony, and fled, as if the demons of remorse and despair were spurring him with red-hot rowels.

"There, you little idiot," roared Vizard, "does that open your eyes?"

"Oh, Mr. Vizard," said Ina reproachfully, "for pity's sake think only of her youth, and what she has to suffer! I can do no more for her. I feel—so—faint."

Ashmead and Rhoda supported her into the carriage; Vizard, touched to the heart by Ina's appeal, held out his eloquent arms to his stricken sister, and she tottered to him, and clung to him, all limp and broken, and wishing she could sink out of the sight of all mankind. He put his strong arm round her, and, though his own heart was desolate and broken, he supported that broken flower of womanhood, and half led, half lifted her on, until he laid her on a sofa in Somerville Villa. Then, for the first time,

he spoke to her. "We are both desolate now, my child. Let us love one another. I will be ten times tenderer to you than I ever have been." She gave a great sob, but she was past speaking.

Ina Klosking, Miss Gale, and Ashmead returned in the carriage to Bagley. Half a mile out of the town they found a man lying on the pathway, with his hat off, and white as a sheet. It was Edward Severne. He had run till he dropped.

Ashmead got down and examined him.

He came back to the carriage-door, looking white enough himself. "It is all over," said he; "the man is dead."

Miss Gale was out in a moment, and examined him. "No," said she. "The heart does not beat perceptibly; but he breathes. It is another of those seizures. Help me get him into the carriage."

This was done, and the driver ordered to go a foot's pace.

The stimulants Miss Gale had brought for Ina Klosking were now applied to revive this malefactor; and both ladies actually ministered to him with compassionate faces. He was a villain; but he was superlatively handsome, and a feather might turn the scale of life or death.

The seizure, though really appalling to look at, did not last long. He revived a little in the carriage, and was taken, still insensible, but breathing hard, into a room in the railway hotel. When he was out of danger, Miss Gale felt Ina Klosking's pulse, and insisted on her going to Taddington by the next train, and leaving Severne to the care of Mr. Ashmead.

Ina, who, in truth, was just then most unfit for any more trials, feebly consented, but not until she had given Ashmead some important instructions respecting her malefactor, and supplied him with funds. Miss Gale also instructed Ashmead how to proceed in case of a relapse, and provided him with materials.

The ladies took a train, which arrived soon after; and being so fortunate as to get a lady's carriage all to themselves, they sat intertwined and rocking together, and Ina Klosking found relief at last in a copious flow of tears.

Rhoda got her to Hillstoke, cooked for her, nursed her, lighted fires, aired her bed, and these two friends slept together in each other's arms.

Ashmead had a hard time of it with Severne: he managed pretty well with him at first, because he stupefied him with

brandy before he had come to his senses, and in that state got him into the next train. But as the fumes wore off, and Severne realised his villainy, his defeat, and his abject condition between the two women he had wronged, he suddenly uttered a yell, and made a spring at the window. Ashmead caught him by his calves, and dragged him so powerfully down, that his face struck the floor hard, and his nose bled profusely. The hæmorrhage and the blow quieted him for a time, and then Ashmead gave him more brandy, and got him to the "Swan" in a half-lethargic lull. This faithful agent and man of all work took a private sitting-room with a double-bedded room adjoining it, and ordered a hot supper with champagne and madeira.

Severne lay on a sofa moaning.

The waiter stared. "Trouble!" whispered Ashmead confidentially. "Take no notice. Supper as quick as possible."

By-and-by Severne started up, and began to rave and tear about the room, cursing his hard fate, and ended in a kind of hysterical fit. Ashmead, being provided by Miss Gale with salts and aromatic vinegar, &c., applied them, and ended by dashing a tumbler of water right into his face, which did him more good than chemistry.

Then he tried to awaken manhood in the fellow. "What are *you* howling about?" said he. "Why, you are the only sinner, and you are the least sufferer. Come, drop snivelling, and eat a bit. Trouble don't do on an empty stomach."

Severne said he would try; but begged the waiter might not be allowed to stare at a broken-hearted man.

"Broken fiddlestick!" said honest Joe.

Severne tried to eat, but could not. But he could drink, and said so.

Ashmead gave him champagne in tumblers, and that, on his empty stomach, set him raving, and saying life was hell to him now. But presently he fell to weeping bitterly. In which condition Ashmead forced him to bed, and there he slept heavily. In the morning Ashmead sat by his bedside, and tried to bring him to reason. "Now, look here," said he, "you are a lucky fellow, if you will only see it. You have escaped bigamy and a jail, and as a reward for your good conduct to your wife, and the many virtues you have exhibited in a short space of time, I am instructed by that lady to pay you twenty pounds every Saturday at twelve o'clock. It is only a thousand a year; but don't

you be down-hearted; I conclude she will raise your salary as you advance. You must forge her name to a heavy cheque, rob a church, and abduct a school-girl or two—misses in their teens and wards of Chancery preferred—and she will make it thirty, no doubt;" and Joe looked very sour.

"That for her twenty pounds a week!" cried this injured man. "She owes me two thousand pounds and more. She has been my enemy and her own. The fool!—to go and peach! She had only to hold her tongue and be Mrs. Vizard, and then she would have had a rich husband that adores her, and I should have had my darling beautiful Zoe, the only woman I ever loved or ever shall."

"Oh," said Ashmead, "then you expected your wife to commit bigamy, and so make it smooth to you?"

"*Of course I did*," was the worthy Severne's reply; "and so she would, if she had had a grain of sense. See what a contrast now! We are all unhappy—herself included,—and it is all her doing."

"Well, young man," said Ashmead, drawing a long breath, "didn't I tell you you are a lucky fellow? You have got £20 a week, and that blest boon, 'a conscience void of offence.' You are a happy man. Here's a strong cup of tea for you; just you drink it, and then get up, and take the train to the little village. There kindred spirits and fresh delights await you. You are not to adorn Barfordshire any longer—that is the order."

"Well, I'll go to London—but not without you."

"Me! What do you want of *me?*"

"You are a good fellow, and the only friend I have left. But for you I should be dead, or mad. You have pulled me through."

"Through the window I did. Lord forgive me for it," said Joseph. "Well, I'll go up to town with you; but I can't be always tied to your tail. I haven't got £20 a week. To be sure," he added drily, "I haven't earned it. That is one comfort."

He telegraphed to Hillstoke, and took Severne up to London.

There the Bohemian very soon found he could live, and even derive some little enjoyment—from his vices—without Joseph Ashmead. He visited him punctually every Saturday and conversed delightfully. If he came any other day, it was sure to be for an advance. He never got it.

CHAPTER XXX

Fanny Dover was sent for directly to Somerville Villa; and three days after the distressing scene I have endeavoured to describe, Vizard brought his wrecked sister home. Her condition was pitiable; and the moment he reached Vizard Court he mounted his horse and rode to Hillstoke to bring Miss Gale down to her.

There he found Ina Klosking, with her boxes at the door, waiting for the fly that was to take her away.

It was a sad interview. He thanked her deeply for her noble conduct to his sister, and then he could not help speaking of his own disappointment.

Mademoiselle Klosking, on this occasion, was simple, sad, and even tender, within prudent limits. She treated this as a parting for ever, and therefore made no secret of her esteem for him. "But," said she, "I hope one day to hear you have found a partner worthy of you. As for me, who am tied for life to one I despise, and can never love again, I shall seek my consolation in music, and, please God, in charitable actions."

He kissed her hand at parting, and gave her a long, long look of miserable regret, that tried her composure hard, and often recurred to her memory.

She went up to London; took a small suburban house; led a secluded life, and devoted herself to her art, making a particular study now of sacred music; she collected volumes of it, and did not disdain to buy it at bookstalls, or wherever she could find it.

Ashmead worked for her, and she made her first appearance in a new oratorio. Her songs proved a principal feature in the performance.

Events did not stand still in Barfordshire; but they were tame compared with those I have lately related, and must be despatched in fewer words.

Aunt Maitland recovered unexpectedly from a severe illness, and was a softened woman; she sent Fanny off to keep Zoe company. That poor girl had a bitter time, and gave Doctress Gale great anxiety. She had no brain-fever, but seemed quietly, insensibly, sinking into her grave. No

appetite, and indeed was threatened with atrophy at one time. But she was so surrounded with loving-kindness that her shame diminished, her pride rose, and at last her agony was blunted, and only a pensive languor remained to show that she had been crushed, and could not be again the bright, proud, high-spirited beauty of Barfordshire.

For many months she never mentioned either Edward Severne, Ina Klosking, or Lord Uxmoor.

It was a long time before she went outside the gates of her own park. She seemed to hate the outer world.

Her first visit was to Miss Gale; that young lady was now very happy. She had her mother with her. Mrs. Gale had defeated the tricky executor, and had come to England with a tidy little capital, saved out of the fire by her sagacity and spirit.

Mrs. Gale's character has been partly revealed by her daughter. I have only to add she was a homely, well-read woman, of few words, but those few—grape-shot. Example—she said to Zoe, "Young lady, excuse an old woman's freedom, who might be your mother. The troubles of young folk have a deal of self in them; more than you could believe. Now just you try something to take you out of self, and you will be another creature."

"Ah," sighed Zoe, "would to heaven I could!"

"Oh," said Mrs. Gale, "anybody with money can do it, and the world so full of real trouble. Now my girl tells me you are kind to the poor; why not do something like Rhoda is doing for this lord she is overseer, or goodness knows what, to?"

Rhoda (*defiantly*), "Viceroy."

"You have money, and your brother will not refuse you a bit o' land. Why not build some of these new-fangled cottages, with fancy gardens, and dwarf palaces for a cow and a pig. Rhoda, child, if I was a poor woman, I could graze a cow in the lanes hereabouts, and feed a pig in the woods. Now you do that for the poor, Miss Vizard, and don't let my girl think for you. Breed your own ideas. That will divert you from self, my dear, and you will begin to find it—there—just as if a black cloud was clearing away from your mind, and letting your heart warm again."

Zoe caught at the idea, and that very day asked Vizard timidly whether he would let her have some land to build a model cottage or two on?

Will it be believed that the good-natured Vizard made

a wry face? "What! two proprietors in Islip?" For a moment or two he was all squire. But soon the brother conquered. "Well," said he, "I can't give you a fee-simple; I must think of my heirs; but I will hold a court, and grant you a copyhold; or I'll give you a ninety-nine years' lease at a peppercorn. There's a slip of three acres on the edge of the Green. You shall amuse yourself with that." He made it over to her directly, for a century, at ten shillings a year; and as he was her surviving trustee, he let her draw in advance on her ten thousand pounds.

Mapping out the ground with Rhoda, settling the gardens, and the miniature pastures, and planning the little houses and out-houses, and talking a great deal, compared with what she transacted, proved really a certain antidote to that lethargy of woe which oppressed her; and here, for a time, I must leave her, returning slowly to health of body and some tranquillity of mind; but still subject to fits of shame and gnawed by bitter regrets.

CHAPTER XXXI

The reputation Mademoiselle Klosking gained in the new oratorio, aided by Ashmead's exertions, launched her in a walk of art that accorded with her sentiments.

She sang in the oratorio whenever it could be performed, and also sang select songs from it, and other sacred songs, at concerts.

She was engaged at a musical festival in the very cathedral town whose choir had been so consoling to her. She entered with great zeal into this engagement, and finding there was a general desire to introduce the leading chorister boy to the public in a duet, she surprised them all by offering to sing the second part with him, if he would rehearse it carefully with her at her lodgings. He was only too glad, as might be supposed. She found he had a lovely voice, but little physical culture. He read correctly, but did not even know the nature of the vocal instrument and its construction, which is that of a bagpipe. She taught him how to keep his lungs full in singing, yet not to gasp, and by this simple means enabled him to sing with more than twice the power he had ever exercised yet. She also taught

him the swell, a figure of music he knew literally nothing about.

When, after singing a great solo, to salvos of applause, Mademoiselle Klosking took the second part with this urchin, the citizens and all the musical people who haunt a cathedral, were on the tiptoe of expectation. The boy amazed them, and the rich contralto that supported him, and rose and swelled with him in ravishing harmony, enchanted them. The vast improvement in the boy's style did not escape the hundreds of persons who knew him, and this duet gave La Klosking a great personal popularity.

Her last song, by her own choice, was, "What though I trace" (Handel), and the majestic volume that rang through the echoing vault showed with what a generous spirit she had subdued that magnificent organ not to crush her juvenile partner in the preceding duet.

Amongst the persons present was Harrington Vizard. He had come there against his judgment; but he could not help it.

He had been cultivating a dull tranquillity, and was even beginning his old game of railing on women, as the great disturbers of male peace. At the sight of her and the sound of her first notes, away went his tranquillity, and he loved her as ardently as ever. But, when she sang his mother's favourite, and the very roof rang, and three thousand souls were thrilled and lifted to heaven by that pure and noble strain, the rapture could not pass away from this one heart; while the ear ached at the cessation of her voice, the heart also ached, and pined, and yearned.

He ceased to resist. From that day he followed her about to her public performances all over the midland counties; and she soon became aware of his presence. She said nothing till Ashmead drew her attention; then being compelled to notice it, she said it was a great pity. Surely he must have more important duties at home.

Ashmead wanted to recognise him, and put him into the best place vacant; but La Klosking said, "No; I will be more his friend than to lend him the least encouragement."

At the end of that tour she returned to London.

While she was there in her little suburban house, she received a visit from Mr. Edward Severne. He came to throw himself at her feet, and beg forgiveness. She said she

would try and forgive him. He then implored her to forget the past. She told him that was beyond her power. He persisted, and told her he had come to his senses; all his misconduct now seemed a hideous dream, and he found he had never really loved any one but her. So then he entreated her to try him once more; to give him back the treasure of her love.

She listened to him like a woman of marble. "Love where I despise!" said she. "Never. The day has gone by when these words can move me. Come to me for the means of enjoying yourself—gambling, drinking, and your other vices—and I shall indulge you. But do not profane the name of love. I forbid you ever to enter my door on that errand. I presume you want money. There is a hundred pounds. Take it; and keep out of my sight till you have wasted it."

He dashed the notes proudly down. She turned her back on him, and glided into another room.

When she returned he was gone, and the hundred pounds had managed to accompany him.

He went straight from her to Ashmead, and talked big. He would sue for restitution of conjugal rights.

"Don't do that, for my sake," said Ashmead. "She will fly the country like a bird, and live in some village on bread and milk."

"Oh, I would not do *you* an ill turn for the world," said the master of arts. "You have been a kind friend to me. You saved my life. It is embittered by remorse, and recollections of the happiness I have thrown away, and the heart I have wronged. No matter!"

This visit disturbed La Klosking, and disposed her to leave London. She listened to a brilliant offer that was made her, through Ashmead, by the manager of the Italian Opera, who was organising a provincial tour. The tour was well advertised in advance, and the company opened to a grand house at Birmingham.

Mademoiselle Klosking had not been long on the stage, when she discovered her discarded husband in the stalls, looking the perfection of youthful beauty. The next minute she saw Vizard in a private box. Mr. Severne applauded her loudly, and flung her a bouquet. Mr. Vizard fixed his eyes on her, beaming with admiration, but made no public demonstration.

The same incident repeated itself every night she sang, and at every town.

At last she spoke about it to Ashmead, in the vague suggestive way her sex excels in. "I presume you have observed the people in front?"

"Yes, madam. Two in particular."

"Could you not advise him to desist?"

"Which of 'em, madam?"

"Mr. Vizard, of course. He is losing his time, and wasting sentiments it is cruel should be wasted."

Ashmead said he dared not take any liberty with Mr. Vizard.

So the thing went on.

Severne made acquaintance with the manager, and obtained the *entrée* behind the scenes. He brought his wife a bouquet every night, and presented it to her with such reverence and grace, that she was obliged to take it and curtsey, or seem rude to the people about.

Then she wrote to Miss Gale, and begged her to come, if she could.

Miss Gale, who had all this time been writing her love-letters twice a week, immediately appointed her mother viceroy, aud went to her friend. Ina Klosking explained the situation to her with a certain slight timidity and confusion not usual to her; and said, "Now, dear, you have more courage than the rest of us; and I know he has a great respect for you; and, indeed, Miss Dover told me he would quite obey you. Would it not be the act of a friend to advise him to cease this unhappy——what good can come of it? He neglects his own duties, and disturbs me in mine. I sometimes ask myself would it not be kinder of me to give up my business, or practise it elsewhere—Germany, or even Italy?"

"Does he call on you?"

"No."

"Does he write to you?"

"Oh no—I wish he would; because then I should be able to reply like a true friend, and send him away. Consider, dear, it is not like a nobody dangling after a public singer; that is common enough. We are all run after by idle men; even Signorina Zubetta, who has not much voice nor appearance, and speaks a Genoese *patois* when she is not delivering a libretto. But for a gentleman of position, with a heart of gold and the soul of an emperor, that he should waste his time and his feelings so on a woman who can never be anything to him, it is pitiable."

"Well, but after all it is his business, and he is not a child; besides, remember he is really very fond of music. If I were you I'd look another way, and take no notice."

"But I cannot."

"Ah!—And why no, pray?"

"Because he always takes a box on my left hand, two from the stage. I can't think how he gets it at all the theatres. And then he fixes his eyes on me so, I cannot help stealing a look. He never applauds, nor throws me bouquets. He looks; oh, you cannot conceive how he looks, and the strange effect it is beginning to produce on me!"

"He mesmerises you?"

"I know not; but it is a growing fascination. Oh, my dear physician, interfere. If it goes on, we shall be more wretched than ever." Then she enveloped Rhoda in her arms, and rested a hot cheek against hers.

"I see," said Rhoda. "You are afraid he will make you love him."

"I hope not. But artists are impressionable; and being looked at so by one I esteem, night after night when my nerves are strung—*cela m'agace;*" and she gave a shiver, and then was a little hysterical; and that was very unlike her.

Rhoda kissed her, and said resolutely she would stop it.

"Not unkindly?"

"Oh no."

"You will not tell him it is offensive to me?"

"No."

"Pray do not give him unnecessary pain."

"No."

"He is not to be mortified."

"No."

"I shall miss him sadly."

"Shall you?"

"Naturally; especially at each new place. Only conceive:—one is always anxious on the stage; and it is one thing to come before a public all strangers, and nearly all poor judges: it is another to see, all ready for your first note, a noble face bright with intelligence and admiration—the face of a friend. Often that one face is the only one I allow myself to see. It hides the whole public."

"Then don't you be silly and send it away. I'll tell you the one fault of your character; you think too much of other people and too little of yourself. Now that is contrary

to the scheme of nature. We are sent into the world to take care of number one."

"What?" said Ina; "are we to be all self-indulgence? Is there to be no principle, no womanly prudence, foresight, discretion? No: I feel the sacrifice; but no power shall hinder me from making it. If you cannot persuade him, I'll do like other singers. I will be ill, and quit the company."

"Don't do that," said Rhoda. "Now you have put on your iron look, it is no use arguing—I know that to my cost. There—I will talk to him. Only don't hurry me; let me take my opportunity."

This being understood, Ina would not part with her for the present, but took her to the theatre. She dismissed her dresser at Rhoda's request, and Rhoda filled that office. So they could talk freely.

Rhoda had never been behind the scenes of a theatre before, and she went prying about, ignoring the music, for she was almost earless. Presently, whom should she encounter but Edward Severne? She started, and looked at him like a basilisk. He removed his hat, and drew back a step with a great air of respect and humility. She was shocked and indignant with Ina for letting him be about her. She followed her off the stage into her dressing-room, and took her to task. "I have seen Mr. Severne here."

"He comes every night."

"And you allow him?"

"It is the manager."

"But he would not admit him if you objected."

"I am afraid to do that."

"Why?"

"We should have an *esclandre.* I find he has had so much consideration for me as to tell no one our relation; and as he has never spoken to me, I do the most prudent thing I can, and take do notice. Should he attempt to intrude himself on me, then it will be time to have him stopped in the hall, and I shall do it *coûte que coûte.* Ah, my dear friend, mine is a difficult and trying position."

After a very long wait, Ina went down and sang her principal song with the usual bravas and thunders of applause. She was called on twice, and as she retired, Severne stepped forward, and with a low, obsequious bow, handed her a beautiful bouquet. She took it with a stately curtsey, but never looked nor smiled. Rhoda saw that and wondered.

She thought to herself, "That is carrying politeness a long way. To be sure, she is half a foreigner."

Having done his nightly homage, Severne left the theatre, and soon afterwards the performance concluded, and Ina took her friend home.

Ashmead was in the hall to show his patroness to her carriage—a duty he never failed in. Rhoda shook hands with him, and he said, "Delighted to see you here, miss. You will be a great comfort to her."

The two friends communed till two o'clock in the morning, but the limits of my tale forbid me to repeat what passed. Suffice it to say that Rhoda was fairly puzzled by the situation; but having a great regard for Vizard, saw clearly enough that he ought to be sent back to Islip. She thought that perhaps the very sight of her would wound his pride, and finding his mania discovered by a third person, he would go of his own accord. So she called on him.

My lord received her with friendly composure, and all his talk was about Islip. He did not condescend to explain his presence at Carlisle. He knew that *qui s'excuse s'accuse,* and left her to remonstrate. She had hardly courage for that, and hoped it might be unnecessary.

She told Ina what she had done. But her visit was futile; at night there was Vizard in his box.

Next day the company opened in Manchester. Vizard was in his box there—Severne in front, till Ina's principal song. Then he came round and presented his bouquet. But this time he came up to Rhoda Gale, and asked her whether a penitent man might pay his respects to her in the morning.

She said she believed there were very few penitents in the world.

"I know one," said he.

"Well, I don't then," said the virago. "But *you* can come, if you are not afraid."

Of course Ina Klosking knew of this appointment two minutes after it was made. She merely said, "Do not let him talk you over."

"He is not so likely to talk me over as you," said Rhoda.

"You are mistaken," was Ina's reply. "I am the one person he will never deceive again."

Rhoda Gale received his visit. He did not beat about the bush, nor fence at all. He declared at once what he came for. He said, "At the first sight of you, whom I have been

so ungrateful to, I could not speak; but now I throw myself on your forgiveness. I think you must have seen that my ingratitude has never sat light on me."

"I have seen that you were terribly afraid of me," said she.

"I daresay I was. But I am not afraid of you now; and here, on my knees, I implore you to forgive my baseness, my ingratitude. Oh, Miss Gale, you don't know what it is to be madly in love; one has no principle, no right feeling, against a real passion; and I was madly in love with her. It was through fear of losing her I disowned my physician, my benefactress, who had saved my life. Miserable wretch! It was through fear of losing her that I behaved like a ruffian to my angel wife, and would have committed bigamy, and been a felon. What was all this but madness? You, who are so wise, will you not forgive me a crime that downright insanity was the cause of?"

"Humph! if I understand right, you wish me to forgive you for looking in my face, and saying to the woman who had saved your life, 'I don't know you?'"

"Yes—if you can. No; now you put it in plain words, I see it is not to be forgiven."

"You are mistaken. It was like a stab to my heart, and I cried bitterly over it."

"Then I deserve to be hanged, that is all."

"But, on consideration, I believe it is as much your nature to be wicked as it is my angel Ina's to be good. So I forgive you that one thing, you charming villain." She held out her hand to him in proof of her good faith.

He threw himself on his knees directly, and kissed and mumbled her hand, and bedewed it with hysterical tears.

"Oh, don't do that," said she; "or I'm bound to give you a good kick. I hate she-men."

"Give me a moment," said he, "and I will be a man again."

He sat with his face in his hands, gulping a little.

"Come," said she, cocking her head like a keen jackdaw; "now let us have the real object of your visit."

"No, no," said he inadvertently—"another time will do for that. I am content with your forgiveness. Now I can wait."

"What for?"

"Can you ask? Do you consider this a happy state of things?"

"Certainly not. But it can't be helped; and we have to thank you for it."

"It could be helped, in time. If you would persuade her to take the first step."

"What step?"

"Not to disown her husband. To let him at least be her friend—her penitent, humble friend. We *are* man and wife. If I were to say so publicly, she would admit it. In this respect at least I have been generous; will she not be generous too? What harm could it do her if we lived under the same roof, and I took her to the theatre, and fetched her home, and did little friendly offices for her?"

"And so get the thin end of the wedge in, eh? Mr. Severne, I decline all interference in a matter so delicate, and in favour of a person who would use her as ill as ever, if he once succeeded in recovering her affections."

So then she dismissed him peremptorily.

But, true to Vizard's interest, she called on him again, and after a few preliminaries, let him know that Severne was every night behind the scenes.

A spasm crossed his face. "I am quite aware of that," said he. "But he is never admitted into her house."

"How do you know?"

"He is under constant surveillance."

"Spies?"

"No—thief-takers; all from Scotland Yard."

"And love brings men down to this. What is it for?"

"When I am sure of your co-operation, I will let you know my hopes."

"He doubts my friendship," said Rhoda sorrowfully.

"No; only your discretion."

"I will be discreet."

"Well, then, sooner or later, he is sure to form some improper connection or other; and then I hope you will aid me in persuading her to divorce him."

"That is not so easy in this country. It is not like our Western States, where, the saying is, they give you five minutes at a railway station for dī—vorce."

"You forget she is a German Protestant, and the marriage was in that country. It will be easy enough."

"Very well; dismiss it from your mind. She will never come before the public in that way. Nothing you nor I could urge would induce her."

Vizard replied doggedly, "I will never despair, so long as she keeps him out of her house."

Rhoda told Ina Klosking this, and said, "Now it is in your own hands. You have only to let your charming villain into your house, and Mr. Vizard will return to Islip."

Ina Klosking buried her face in her hands and thought.

At night, Vizard in his box as usual. Severne behind the scenes with his bouquet. But this night he stayed for the ballet, to see a French *danseuse* who had joined them. He was acquainted with her before, and had a sprightly conversation with her. In other words, he renewed an old flirtation.

The next opera night all went as usual. Vizard in the box, looking sadder than usual. Rhoda's good sense had not been entirely wasted. Severne, with his bouquet, and his grave humility, until the play ended, and La Klosking passed out into the hall. Her back was hardly turned when Mdlle. Lafontaine, dressed for the ballet, in a most spicy costume, danced up to her old friend, and slapped his face very softly with a rose, then sprang away, and stood on her defence.

"I'll have that rose," cried Severne.

"*Nenni.*"

"And a kiss into the bargain."

"*Jamais.*"

"C'est ce que nous verrons."

He chased her. She uttered a feigned "Ah!" and darted away. He followed her; she crossed the scene at the back, where it was dark, bounded over an open trap, which she saw just in time, but Severne, not seeing it, because she was between him and it, fell through it, and striking the mazarine, fell into the cellar, fifteen feet below the stage.

The screams of the dancer soon brought a crowd round the trap, and reached Mademoiselle Klosking just as she was going out to her carriage. "There!" she cried: "another accident!" and she came back, making sure it was some poor carpenter come to grief, as usual. On such occasions her purse was always ready.

They brought Severne up sensible, but moaning, and bleeding at the temple, and looking all streaky about the face.

They were going to take him to the infirmary; but Mademoiselle Klosking, with a face of angelic pity, said, "No; he bleeds, he bleeds. He must go to my house."

They stared a little; but it takes a good deal to astonish people in a theatre.

Severne was carried out, his head hastily bandaged, and he was lifted into La Klosking's carriage. One of the people of the theatre was directed to go on the box, and La Klosking and Ashmead supported him, and he was taken to her lodgings. She directed him to be laid on a couch, and a physician sent for, Miss Gale not having yet returned from Liverpool, whither she had gone to attend a lecture.

Ashmead went for the physician. But almost at the door he met Miss Gale and Mr. Vizard.

"Miss," said he, "you are wanted. There has been an accident. Mr. Severne has fallen through a trap, and into the cellar.

"No bones broken?"

"Not he; he has only broken his head; and that will cost her a broken heart."

"Where is he?"

"Where I hoped never to see him again."

"What! in her house?" said Rhoda, and hurried off at once.

"Mr. Ashmead," said Vizard, "a word with you."

"By all means, sir," said Ashmead, "as we go for the doctor. Dr. Menteith has a great name. He lives close by your hotel, sir."

As they went Vizard asked him what he meant by saying this incident would cost her a broken heart.

"Why, sir," said Ashmead, "he is on his good behaviour to get back; has been for months begging and praying just to be let live under the same roof. She has always refused. But some fellows have such luck. I don't say he fell down a trap on purpose; but he has done it, and no broken bones, but plenty of blood. That is the very thing to overcome a woman's feelings; and she is not proof against pity. He will have her again. Why, she is his nurse now; and see how that will work. We have a week's more business here; and, by bad luck, a dead fortnight, all along of Dublin falling through unexpectedly. He is as artful as Old Nick; he will spin out that broken head of his, and make it last all the three weeks; and she will nurse him, and he will be weak, and grateful, and cry, and beg her pardon six times a day; and she is only a woman, after all; and they are man and wife, when all is done. The road is beaten. They will

run upon it again, till his time is up to play the rogue as bad as ever."

"You torture me," said Vizard.

"I am afraid I do, sir; but I feel it my duty. Mr. Vizard, you are a noble gentleman, and I am only what you see; but the humblest folk will have their likes and dislikes, and I have a great respect for you, sir. I can't tell you the mixture of things I feel when I see you in the same box every night. Of course I am her agent, and the house would not be complete without you; but as a man I am sorry—especially now that she has let him into her house. Take a humble friend's advice, sir, and cut it. Don't you come between any woman and her husband, especially a public lady. She will never be more to you than she is. She is a good woman, and he must keep gaining ground. He has got the pull. Rouse all your pride, sir, and your manhood, and you have got plenty of both, and cut it; don't look right nor left, but cut it—and forgive my presumption."

Vizard was greatly moved. "Give me your hand," he said; "you are a worthy man. I'll act on your advice, and never forget what I owe you. Stick to me like a leech, and see me off by the next train, for I am going to tear my heart out of my bosom."

Luckily there was a train in half an hour, and Ashmead saw him off; then went to supper. He did not return to Ina's lodgings. He did not want to see Severne nursed. He liked the fellow too; but he saw through him clean; and he worshipped Ina Klosking.

CHAPTER XXXII

At one o'clock next day Ashmead received a note from Mademoiselle Klosking, saying, "Arrange with Mr. X. to close my tour with Manchester. Pay the fortnight, if required." She was with the company at a month's notice on either side, you must understand.

Instead of going to the manager, he went at once, in utter dismay, to Mademoiselle Klosking, and there learned in substance what I must now briefly relate.

Miss Gale found Edward Severne deposited on a sofa. Ina was on her knees by his side, sponging his bleeding temple

with looks of gentle pity. Strange to say the wound was in the same place as his wife's, but more contused, and no large vein was divided. Miss Gale soon stanched that. She asked him where his pain was. He said it was in his head and his back; and he cast a haggard, anxious look on her.

"Take my arm," said she. "Now, stand up."

He tried but could not, and said his legs were benumbed. Miss Gale looked grave.

"Lay him on my bed," said La Klosking. "That is better than these hard couches."

"You are right," said Miss Gale. "Ring for the servants. He must be moved gently."

He was carried in, and set upon the edge of the bed, and his coat and waistcoat taken off. Then he was laid gently down on the bed, and covered with a down quilt.

Doctress Gale then requested Ina to leave the room, while she questioned the patient.

Ina retired.

In a moment or two Miss Gale came out to her softly.

At sight of her face, La Klosking said, "Oh dear; it is more serious than we thought."

"Very serious."

"Poor Edward!"

"Collect all your courage, for I cannot lie, either to patient or friend."

"And you are right," said La Klosking, trembling. "I see he is in danger."

"Worse than that. Where there's danger there is hope; here there is none. HE IS A DEAD MAN!"

"Oh no! no!"

"He has broken his back, and nothing can save him. His lower limbs have already lost sensation; death will creep over the rest. Do not disturb your mind with idle hopes. You have two things to thank God for—that you took him into your own house, and that he will die easily. Indeed, were he to suffer, I should stupefy him at once, for nothing can *hurt* him."

Ina Klosking turned faint, and her knees gave way under her. Rhoda ministered to her; and while she was so employed, Dr. Menteith was announced. He was shown in to the patient, and the accident described to him. He questioned the patient, and examined him alone.

He then came out, and said he would draw a prescription. He did so.

"Doctor," said La Klosking, "tell me the truth. It cannot be worse than I fear."

"Madam," said the doctor, "medicine can do nothing for him. The spinal cord is divided. Give him anything he fancies, and my prescription if he suffers pain, not otherwise. Shall I send you a nurse?"

"No," said Mademoiselle Klosking, "*we* will nurse him night and day."

He retired, and the friends entered on their sad duties.

When Severne saw them both by his bedside, with earnest looks of pity, he said, "Do not worry yourselves; I'm booked for the long journey. Ah, well, I shall die where I ought to have lived, and might have, if I had not been a fool."

Ina wept bitterly,

They nursed him night and day. He suffered little, and when he did, Miss Gale stupefied the pain at once; for, as she truly said, "nothing can hurt him." Vitality gradually retired to his head, and lingered there a whole day. But, to his last moment, the art of pleasing never abandoned him. Instead of worrying for this or that every moment, he showed in this desperate condition singular patience and well-bred fortitude. He checked his wife's tears; assured her it was all for the best, and that he was reconciled to the inevitable. "I have had a happier time than I deserve," said he; "and now I have a painless death, nursed by two sweet women. My only regret is that I shall not be able to repay your devotion, Ina, nor become worthy of your friendship, Miss Gale."

He died without fear, it being his conviction that he should return after death to the precise condition in which he was before birth; and when they begged him to see a clergyman, he said, "Pray do not give yourselves or him that trouble. I can melt back into the universe without his assistance."

He even died content; for this polished Bohemian had often foreseen that, if he lived long, he should die miserably.

But the main feature of his end was his extraordinary politeness. He paid Miss Gale compliments just as if he was at his ease on a sofa; and scarce an hour before his decease he said, faintly, "I declare—I have been so busy—dying—I have forgotten to send my kind regards to good Mr. Ashmead. Pray tell him I did not forget his kindness to me."

He just ceased to live, so quiet was his death, and a smile rested on his dead features, and they were as beautiful as ever.

So ended a fair, pernicious creature, endowed too richly with the art of pleasing, and quite devoid of principle. Few bad men knew right so well, and went so wrong.

Ina buried her face for hours on his bed, and kissed his cold features and hand. She had told him before he died she would recall all her resolutions, if he would live. But he was gone. Death buries a man's many faults, and his few virtues rise again. She mourned him sincerely, and would not be comforted; she purchased a burying-place for ever, and laid him in it; then she took her aching heart far away, and was lost to the public and to all her English friends.

The faithful Rhoda accompanied her half-way to London, then returned to her own duties in Barfordshire.

CHAPTER XXXIII

I MUST now retrograde a little, to relate something rather curious, and I hope not uninteresting.

Zoe Vizard had been for some time acting on Mrs. Gale's advice; building, planning for the good of the poor, and going out of herself more and more. She compared notes constantly with Miss Gale, and conceived a friendship for her. It had been a long time coming, because at first she disliked Miss Gale's manners very much. But that lady had nursed her tenderly, and now advised her; and Zoe, who could not do anything by halves, became devoted to her.

As she warmed to her good work, she gave signs of clearer judgment. She never mentioned Severne, but she no longer absolutely avoided Ina Klosking's name; and one day she spoke of her as a high-principled woman; for which the Gale kissed her on the spot.

One name she often uttered, and always with regret and self-reproach—Lord Uxmoor's. I think that, now she was herself building and planning for the permanent improvement of the poor, she felt the tie of a kindred sentiment.

Uxmoor was her predecessor in this good work too; and would have been her associate, if she had not been so blind. This thought struck deep in her. Her mind ran more and more on Uxmoor, his manliness, his courage in her defence, and his gentlemanly fortitude and bravery in leaving her, without a word, at her request. Running over all these, she often blushed with shame, and her eyes filled with sorrow at thinking of how she had treated him, and lost him for ever by not deserving him.

She even made oblique and timid inquiries; but could learn nothing of him, except that he sent periodical remittances to Miss Gale, for managing his improvements. These, however, came in through a country agent from a town agent, and left no clue.

But one fine day, with no warning except to his own people, Lord Uxmoor came home; and the next day rode to Hillstoke to talk matters over with Miss Gale. He was fortunate enough to find her at home. He thanked her for the zeal and enthusiasm she had shown, and the progress his works had made under her supervision.

He was going away without even mentioning the Vizard family.

But the crafty Gale detained him. "Going to Vizard Court?" said she.

"No," said he, very drily.

"Ah, I understand; but perhaps you would not mind going with me as far as Islip. There is something there I wish you to see."

"Humph! Is it anything very particular? Because——"

"It is. Three cottages rising, with little flower-gardens in front, square plots behind, and arrangements for breeding calves, with other ingenious novelties. A new head come into our business, my lord."

"You have converted Vizard? I thought you would. He is a satirical fellow; but he will listen to reason."

"No; it is not Mr. Vizard. Indeed it is no convert of mine. It is an independent enthusiast. But I really believe your work at home had some hand in firing her enthusiasm."

"A lady! Do I know her?"

"You may. I suppose you know everybody in Barfordshire. Will you come? Do!"

"Of course I will come, Miss Gale. Please tell one of your people to walk my horse down after us."

She had her hat on in a moment, and walked him down to Islip.

Her tongue was not idle on the road. "You don't ask after the people," said she. "There's poor Miss Vizard. She had a sad illness. We were almost afraid we should lose her."

"Heaven forbid!" said Uxmoor, startled by this sudden news.

"Mademoiselle Klosking got quite well; and, oh! what do you think? Mr. Severne turned out to be her husband."

"What is that?" shouted Uxmoor, and stopped dead short. "Mr. Severne a married man!"

"Yes; and Mademoiselle Klosking a married woman."

"You amaze me. Why, that Mr. Severne was paying his attentions to Miss Vizard."

"So I used to fancy," said Rhoda carelessly. "But you see, it came out he was married, and so of course she packed him off with a flea in his ear."

"Did she?—when was that?"

"Let me see, it was the 17th of October."

"Why, that was the very day I left England."

"How odd! Why did you not stay another week? Gentlemen are so impatient. Never mind, that is an old story now. Here we are; those are the cottages. The workmen are at dinner. Ten to one the enthusiast is there; this is her time. You stay here; I'll go and see." She went off on tiptoe, and peeped and pried here and there, like a young witch. Presently she took a few steps towards him, with her finger mysteriously to her lips, and beckoned him. He entered into the pantomime—she seemed so earnest in it—and came to her softly.'

"Do just take a peep in at that opening for a door," said she, "then you'll see her; her back is turned. She is lovely; only, you know, she has been ill, and I don't think she is very happy."

Uxmoor thought this peeping at enthusiasts rather an odd proceeding, but Miss Gale had primed his curiosity, and he felt naturally proud of a female pupil. He stepped up lightly, looked in at the door, and to his amazement saw Zoe Vizard sitting on a carpenter's bench, with her lovely head in the sun's rays. He started, then gazed, then devoured her with his eyes.

What! was this his pupil?

How gentle and sad she seemed! All his stoicism melted

at the sight of her. She sat in a sweet pensive attitude, pale and drooping, but, to his fancy, lovelier than ever. She gave a little sigh. His heart yearned. She took out a letter, read it slowly, and said, softly and slowly, "Poor fel-low!" He thought he recognised his own handwriting, and could stand no more. He rushed in, and was going to speak to her; but she screamed, and no conjurer ever made a card disappear quicker than she did that letter, as she bounded away like a deer, and stood blushing scarlet, and palpitating all over.

Uxmoor was ashamed of his *brusquerie*.

"What a brute I am, to frighten you like this!" said he. "Pray forgive me; but the sight of you, after all these weary months—and you said 'Poor fellow!'"

"Did I?" said Zoe faintly, looking scared.

"Yes, sweet Zoe; and you were reading a letter."

No reply.

"I thought the poor fellow might be myself. Not that I am to be pitied, if you think of me still."

"I do, then—very often. Oh, Lord Uxmoor, I want to go down on my knees to you."

"That is odd, now; for it is exactly what I should like to do to you."

"What for? It is I who have behaved so ill."

"Never mind that; I love you."

"But you mustn't. You must love some worthy person."

"Oh, you leave that to me. I have no other intention. But may I just see whose letter you were reading?"

"Oh, pray don't ask me."

"I insist on knowing."

"I will not tell you. There it is." She gave it to him with a guilty air, and hid her face.

"Dear Zoe, suppose I was to repeat the offer I made here?"

"I advise you not," said she, all in a flurry.

"Why?"

"Because—because—I might say 'yes.'"

"Well, then, I'll take my chance once more. Zoe, will you try and love me?"

"Try? I believe I do love you, or nearly. I think of you very often."

"Then you will do something to make me happy."

"Anything; everything."

"Will you marry me?"

"Yes, that I will," said Zoe, almost impetuously; "and

then," with a grand look of conscious beauty, "I can *make* you forgive me."

Uxmoor, on this, caught her in his arms, and kissed her with such fire that she uttered a little stifled cry of alarm; but it was soon followed by a sigh of complacency, and she sank, resistless, on his manly breast.

So, after two sieges, he carried that fair citadel by assault.

Then let not the manly heart despair, nor take a mere brace of "Noes" from any woman. Nothing short of three negatives is serious.

They walked out arm in arm, and very close to each other; and he left her, solemnly engaged.

Leaving this pair to the delights of courtship, and growing affection on Zoe's side—for a warm attachment of the noblest kind did grow, by degrees, out of her penitence and esteem and desire to repair her fault—I must now take up the other thread of this narrative, and apologise for having inverted the order of events; for it was, in reality, several days after this happy scene that Mademoiselle Klosking sent for Miss Gale.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Vizard, then, with Ashmead, returned home in despair; and Zoe, now happy in her own mind, was all tenderness and sisterly consolation. They opened their hearts to each other, and she showed her wish to repay the debt she owed him. How far she might have succeeded, in time, will never be known. For he had hardly been home a week, when Miss Gale returned, all in black, and told him Severne was dead and buried.

He was startled, and even shocked, remembering old times; but it was not in human nature he should be sorry. Not to be indecorously glad at so opportune an exit was all that could be expected from him.

When she had given him the details his first question was, "How did she bear it?"

"She is terribly cut up—more than one would think possible; for she was ice and marble to him before he was hurt to death."

"Where is she?"

"Gone to London. She will write to me, I suppose, poor dear. But one must give her time."

From that hour Vizard was in a state of excitement, hoping to hear from Ina Klosking, or about her; but unwilling, from delicacy, to hurry matters.

At last he became impatient and wrote to Ashmead, whose address he had, and said frankly he had a delicacy in intruding on Mademoiselle Klosking in her grief. Yet his own feelings would not allow him to seem to neglect her. Would Mr. Ashmead, then, tell him where she was, as she had not written to any one in Barfordshire,—not even to her tried friend, Miss Gale.

He received an answer by return of post:—

"Dear Sir,—I am grieved to tell you that Mademoiselle Klosking has retired from public life. She wrote to me three weeks ago, from Dover, requesting me to accept, as a token of her esteem, the surplus money I hold in hand for her—I always drew her salary—and bidding me farewell. The sum included her profits by Psalmody, minus her expenses, and was so large it could never have been intended as a mere recognition of my humble services; and I think I have seldom felt so down-hearted as on receiving this princely donation. It has enabled me to take better offices, and it may be the foundation of a little fortune; but I feel that I have lost the truly great lady who has made a man of me. Sir, the relish is gone for my occupation. I can never be so happy as I was in working the interest of that great genius, whose voice made our leading soprani sound like whistles, and who honoured me with her friendship. Sir, she was not like other leading ladies, she never bragged, never spoke ill of any one; and *you* can testify to her virtue and her discretion.

"I am truly sorry to learn from you that she has written to no one in Barfordshire. I saw, by her letter to me, she had left the stage; but her dropping you all looks as if she had left the world. I do hope she has not been so mad as to go into one of those cursed convents.

"Mr. Vizard, I will now write to friends in all the Continental towns where there is good music. She will not be able to keep away from that long. I will also send photographs; and hope we may hear something. If not, perhaps a *judicious advertisement* might remind her that she is inflicting pain upon persons to whom she is dear.—I am, sir, your obliged and grateful servant,

"Joseph Ashmead."

Here was a blow. I really believe Vizard felt this more deeply than all his other disappointments.

He brooded over it for a day or two; and then, as he thought Miss Gale a very ill-used person, though not, of course, so ill-used as himself, he took her Ashmead's letter.

"This is nice," said she. "There—I must give up loving women. Besides, they throw me over the moment a man comes, if it happens to be the right one."

"Unnatural creatures!" said Vizard.

"Ungrateful, at all events."

"Do you think she has gone into a convent?"

"Not she. In the first place, she is a Protestant; and in the second, she is not a fool."

"I will advertise."

"The idea!"

"Do you think I am going to sit down with my hands before me, and lose her for ever?"

"No, indeed; I don't think you are that sort of man at all, ha! ha!"

"Oh, Miss Gale, pity me. Tell me how to find her. That Fanny Dover says women are only enigmas to men, they understand one another."

"What!" said Rhoda, turning swiftly on him; "does that little chit pretend to read my noble Ina?"

"If she cannot, perhaps you can; you are so shrewd. Do tell me, what does it all mean?"

"It means nothing at all, I daresay; only a woman's impulse. They are such geese at times, every one of them."

"Oh, if I did but know what country she is in, I would ransack it!"

"Hum!—countries are biggish places."

"I don't care."

"What will you give me to tell you where she is at this moment?"

"All I have in the world."

"That is sufficient. Well, then, first assign me your estates; then fetch me an ordnance map of creation, and I will put my finger on her."

"You little mocking fiend, you!"

"I am not. I'm a tall, beneficent angel; and I'll tell you where she is—for nothing. Keep your land; who wants it?—it is only a bother."

"For pity's sake, don't trifle with me."

"I never will, where your heart is interested. She is at Zutzig."

"Ah, you good girl! She has written to you."

"Not a line, the monster! And I'll serve her out. I'll teach her to play hide-and-seek with Gale, M.D."

"Zutzig!" said Vizard; "how can you know?"

"What does *that* matter? Well—yes—I will reveal the mental process. First of all, she has gone to her mother."

"How do you know that?"

"Oh dear, dear, dear! Because that is where every daughter goes in trouble. I should—she *has*. Fancy you not seeing that! Why, Fanny Dover would have told you that much in a moment. But now you will have to thank *my* mother for teaching me Attention, the parent of Memory. Pray, sir, who were the witnesses to that abominable marriage of hers?"

"I remember two, Baron Hompesch——"

"No, Count Hompesch."

"And Count Meurice."

"Viscount. What! have you forgotten Herr Formes, Fräulein Graafe, Zug the Capellmeister, and her very mother? Come now, whose daughter is she?"

"I forget, I'm sure."

"Walter Ferris and Eva Klosking, of Zutzig, in Denmark. Pack—start for Copenhagen. Consult an ordnance map there. Find out Zutzig. Go to Zutzig, and you have got her. It is some hole in a wilderness, and she can't escape."

"You clever little angel! I'll be there in three days. Do you really think I shall succeed?"

"Your own fault if you don't. She has run into a *cul de sac* through being too clever; and besides, women sometimes run away just to be caught, and hide on purpose to be found. I should not wonder if she has said to herself, 'He will find me if he loves me so very, very much—I'll try him.'"

"Not a word more, angelic Fox," said Vizard; "I'm off to Zutzig."

He went out on fire. She opened the window, and screeched after him, "Everything is fair after her behaviour to me. Take her a book of those spiritual songs she is so fond of. 'Johnny comes marching home' is worth the lot, I reckon."

Away went Vizard; found Copenhagen with ease; Zutzig

with difficulty, being a small village. But once there, he soon found the farm-house of Eva Klosking. He drove up to the door. A Danish labourer came out from the stable directly; and a buxom girl, with pale golden hair, opened the door. These two seized his luggage, and conveyed it into the house, and the hired vehicle to the stable. Vizard thought it must be an inn.

The girl bubbled melodious sounds, and ran off and brought a sweet, venerable dame. Vizard recognised Eva Klosking at once.

The old lady said, "Few strangers come here—are you not English?"

"Yes, madam."

"It is Mr. Vizard—is it not?"

"Yes, madam."

"Ah, sir, my daughter will welcome you, but not more heartily than I do. My child has told me all she owes to you"—then in Danish, "God bless the hour you come under this roof."

Vizard's heart beat tumultuously, wondering how Ina Klosking would receive him. The servant had told her a tall stranger was come. She knew in a moment who it was; so she had the advantage of being prepared.

She came to him, her cheeks dyed with blushes, and gave him both hands. "You here!" said she; "oh happy day! Mother, he must have the south chamber. I will go and prepare it for him. Tecla!—Tecla!"—and she was all hostess. She committed him to her mother, whilst she and the servant went upstairs.

He felt discomfited a little. He wanted to know, all in a moment, whether she would love him.

However, Danish hospitality has its good side. He soon found out he might live the rest of his days there if he chose.

He soon got her alone, and said, "You knew I should find you, cruel one."

"How could I dream of such a thing?" said she blushing.

"Oh, Love is a detective. You said to yourself, 'If he loves me as I ought to be loved, he will search Europe for me; but he will find me.'"

"Oh, then it was not to be at peace and rest on my mother's bosom I came here—it was to give you the trouble of running after me. Oh fie!"

"You are right. I am a vain fool."

"No, that you are not. After all, how do I know all that was in my heart? [Ahem!] Be sure of this, you are very welcome. I must go and see about your dinner."

In that Danish farm-house life was very primitive. Eva Klosking, and both her daughters, helped the two female servants, or directed them, in every department. So Ina, who was on her defence, had many excuses for escaping Vizard, when he pressed her too hotly. But at last she was obliged to say, "Oh, pray, my friend, we are in Denmark; here widows are expected to be discreet."

"But that is no reason why the English fellows who adore them should be discreet."

"Perhaps not; but then the Danish lady runs away."

Which she did.

But, after the bustle of the first day, he had so many opportunities. He walked with her, sat with her while she worked, and hung over her, entranced, while she sang. He produced the book from Vizard Court, without warning, and she screamed with delight at sight of it, and caught his hand in both hers, and kissed it. She revelled in those sweet strains which had comforted her in affliction; and oh, the eyes she turned on him after singing any song in this particular book. Those tender glances thrilled him to the very marrow.

To tell the honest truth, his arrival was a godsend to Ina Klosking. When she first came home to her native place, and laid her head on her mother's bosom, she was in Elysium. The house, the wood-fires, the cooing doves, the bleating calves, the primitive life, the recollections of childhood, all were balm to her, and she felt like ending her days there. But, as the days rolled on, came a sense of monotony, and excessive tranquillity. She was on the verge of *ennui* when Vizard broke in upon her.

From that moment there was no stagnation. He made life very pleasant to her; only her delicacy took the alarm at his open declarations—she thought them so premature.

At last he said to her one day, "I begin to fear you will never love me as I love you."

"Who knows?" said she. "Time works wonders."

"I wonder," said he, "whether you will ever marry any other man?"

Ina was shocked at that. "Oh, my friend, how could I—unless," said she, with a sly side-glance, "you consented?"

"Consent? I'd massacre him."

Ina turned towards him. "You asked my hand at a time when you thought me—I don't know what you thought—that is a thing no woman could forget. And now you have come all this way for me. I am yours, if you can wait for me."

He caught her in his arms. She disengaged herself gently, and her hand rested an unnecessary moment on his shoulder. "Is that how you understand 'waiting?'" said she, with a blush, but an indulgent smile.

"What is the use waiting?"

"It is a matter of propriety."

"How long are we to wait?"

"Only a few months. My friend, it is like a boy to be too impatient. Alas! would you marry me in my widow's cap?"

"Of course I would. Now, Ina, love, a widow who has been two years separated from her husband!"

"Certainly, that makes a difference—in one's own mind. But one must respect the opinion of the world. Dear friend, it is of you I think, though I speak of myself."

"You are an angel. Take your own time. After all, what does it matter? I don't leave Zutzig without you."

Ina's pink tint and sparkling eyes betrayed anything but horror at that insane resolution. However, she felt it her duty to say that it was unfortunate she should always be the person to distract him from his home duties.

"Oh, never mind them," said this single-hearted lover. "I have appointed Miss Gale viceroy."

However, one day he had a letter from Zoe, telling him that Lord Uxmoor was now urging her to name the day; but she had declined to do that, not knowing when it might suit him to be at Vizard Court. "But, dearest," said she, "mind, you are not to hurry home for me. I am very happy as I am, and I hope you will soon be as happy, love. She is a noble woman."

The latter part of this letter tempted Vizard to show it to Ina. He soon found his mistake. She kissed it, and ordered him off. He remonstrated. She put on, for the first time in Denmark, her marble look, and said, "You will lessen my esteem if you are cruel to your sister. Let her name the wedding-day at once; and you must be there to give her away, and bless her union with a brother's love."

He submitted, but a little sullenly, and said it was very hard.

He wrote to his sister accordingly, and she named the day, and Vizard settled to start for home and be in time.

As to the proprieties, he had instructed Miss Maitland and Fanny Dover, and given them and La Gale *carte blanche.* It was to be a magnificent wedding.

This being excitement, Fanny Dover was in paradise. Moreover, a rosy-cheeked curate had taken the place of the venerable vicar, and Miss Dover's threat to flirt out the stigma of a nun was executed with promptitude, zeal, pertinacity, and the dexterity that comes of practice. When the day came for his leaving Zutzig, Vizard was dejected. "Who knows when we may meet again?" said he.

Ina consoled him. "Do not be sad, dear friend. You are doing your duty; and as you do it partly to please me, I ought to try and reward you; ought I not?" And she gave him a strange look.

"I advise you not to press that question," said he.

At the very hour of parting, Ina's eyes were moist with tenderness, but there was a smile on her face very expressive; yet he could not make out what it meant. She did not cry. He thought that hard. It was his opinion that women could always cry. She might have done the usual thing just to gratify him.

He reached home in good time; and played the grand seigneur—nobody could do it better when driven to it—to do honour to his sister. She was a peerless bride. She stood superior with ebon locks and coal-black eyes, encircled by six bridesmaids—all picked blondes. The bevy, with that glorious figure in the middle, seemed one glorious and rare flower.

After the wedding, the breakfast; and then the travelling-carriage—the four liveried postilions bedecked with favours.

But the bride wept on Vizard's neck; and a light seemed to leave the house when she was gone. The carriages kept driving away one after another till four o'clock; and then Vizard sat disconsolate in his study, and felt very lonely.

Yet a thing no bigger than a leaf sufficed to drive away this sombre mood, a piece of amber-coloured paper scribbled on with a pencil—a telegram from Ashmead: "Good news; lost sheep turned up. Is now with her mother at Claridge's Hotel."

Then Vizard was in raptures. Now, he understood Ina's composure, and the half-sly look she had given him, and her dry eyes at parting, and other things. He tore up to London directly, with a telegram flying a-head; burst in upon her and had her in his arms in a moment, before her mother. She fenced no longer, but owned he had gained her love, as he had deserved it in every way.

She consented to be married that week in London; only she asked for a Continental tour, before entering Vizard Court as his wife. But she did not stipulate even for that; she only asked it submissively, as one whose duty it now was to obey, not dictate.

They were married in St. George's Church very quietly, by special licence. Then they saw her mother off, and crossed to Calais. They spent two happy months together on the Continent, and returned to London.

But Vizard was too old-fashioned, and too proud of his wife, to sneak into Vizard Court with her. He did not make it a county matter; but he gave the village such a *fête* as had not been seen for many a day. The preparations were intrusted to Mr. Ashmead, at Ina's request. "He will be sure to make it theatrical," she said; "but perhaps the simple villagers will admire that, and it will amuse you and me, love; and the poor dear old Thing will be in his glory—I hope he will not drink too much."

Ashmead was indeed in his glory. Nothing had been seen in a play that he did not electrify Islip with, and the surrounding villages. He pasted large posters on walls and barndoors, and his small bills curled round the patriarchs of the forest and the roadside trees, and blistered the gate-posts.

The day came. A soapy-pole, with a leg of mutton on high for the successful climber; races in sacks; short blind-fold races with wheel-barrows; pig with a greasy tail, to be won by him who could catch him and shoulder him, without touching any other part of him; bowls of treacle for the boys to duck heads in and fish out coins; skittles, nine-pins, Aunt Sally, &c., &c., &c.

But what astonished the villagers most was a May-pole, with long ribbons, about which ballet-girls, undisguised as Highlanders, danced, and wound and unwound the parti-coloured streamers, to the merry fiddle, and then danced reels upon a platform, then returned to their little tent;

but out again and danced hornpipes undisguised as Jacky Tars.

Beer flowed from a sturdy regiment of barrels. "The Court" kitchen and the village bakehouse kept pouring forth meats, baked, boiled, and roast; there was a pile of loaves like a haystack; and they roasted an ox whole on the green; and when they found they were burning him raw, they fetched the butcher, like sensible fellows, and dismembered the giant, and so roasted him reasonably.

In the midst of the revelling and feasting, Vizard and Mrs. Vizard were driven into Islip village, in the family coach with four horses, streaming with ribbons.

They drove round the green, bowing and smiling in answer to the acclamations and blessings of the poor, and then to Vizard Court. The great doors flew open. The servants, male and female, lined the hall on both sides, and received her, bowing and curtseying low, on the very spot where she had nearly met her death. Her husband took her hand and conducted her in state to her own apartment.

It was open house to all, that joyful day; and at night magnificent fireworks on the sweep, seen from the drawing-room by Mrs. Vizard, Miss Maitland, Miss Gale, Miss Dover, and the rosy-cheeked curate, whom she had tied to her apron-strings.

At two in the morning, Mr. Harris showed Mr. Ashmead to his couch. Both gentlemen went up the stairs a little graver than any of our modern judges, and firm as a rock; but their firmness resembled that of a roof rather than a wall; for these dignities as they went made one inverted V—so, Λ.

It is time the Woman-Hater drew to a close, for the woman-hater is spoilt. He begins sarcastic speeches, from force of habit, but stops short in the middle. He is a very happy man, and owes it to a woman, and knows it. He adores her; and to love well is to be happy. But, besides that, she watches over his happiness and his good with that unobtrusive but minute vigilance which belongs to her sex, and is often misapplied, but not so very often as cynics say. Even the honest friendship between him and the remarkable woman he calls his "virago," gives him many a pleasant hour. He is still a humorist, though cured of his fling at the fair sex. His last tolerable hit was at the monosyllabic names of the immortal composers his wife had disinterred in his library.

Says he to parson Denison, hot from Oxford, "They remind me of the Oxford poets in the last century :—

'Alma novem celebres genuit Rhedyeina Poetas.
Bubb, Stubb, Grubb, Crabbe, Trappe, Brome, Carey, Tickell, Evans.'"

As for Ina Vizard, La Klosking no longer, she has stepped into her new place with her native dignity, seemliness, and composure. At first, a few county ladies put their little heads together, and prepared to give themselves airs; but the beauty, dignity, and enchanting grace of Mrs. Vizard swept this little faction away like small dust. Her perfect courtesy, her mild but deep dislike of all feminine back-biting, her dead silence about the absent, except when she can speak kindly—these rare traits have forced, by degrees, the esteem and confidence of her own sex. As for the men, they accepted her at once with enthusiasm. She and Lady Uxmoor are the acknowledged belles of the county. Lady Uxmoor's face is the most admired; but Mrs. Vizard comes next—and her satin shoulders, statuesque bust and arms, and exquisite hand, turn the scale with some. But when she speaks, she charms; and when she sings, all competition dies.

She is faithful to music, and especially to sacred music. She is not very fond of singing at parties, and sometimes gives offence by declining. Music sets fools talking, because it excites them, and then their folly comes out by the road Nature has provided. But when Mrs. Vizard has to sing in one key, and people talk in five other keys, that gives this artist such physical pain that she often declines, merely to escape it. It does not much mortify her vanity, she has so little.

She always sings in church, and sings out, too, when she is there; and plays the harmonium. She trains the villagers —girls, boys, and adults—with untiring good-humour and patience.

Amongst her pupils are two fine voices: Tom Wilder, a grand bass,—and the rosy-cheeked curate, a greater rarity still, a genuine counter-tenor.

These two can both read music tolerably; but the curate used to sing everything, however full of joy, with a pathetic whine, for which Vizard chaffed him in vain; but Mrs. Vizard *persuaded* him out of it, where argument and satire failed.

People came far and near to hear the hymns at Islip

Church, sung in full harmony—trebles, tenor, counter-tenor, and bass.

A trait — she allows nothing to be sung in church unrehearsed. The rehearsals are on Saturday night, and never shirked, such is the respect for "Our Dame." To be sure, "Our Dame" fills the stomachs and wets the whistles of her faithful choir on Saturday nights.

On Sunday night there are performances of sacred music in the great dining-hall. But these are rather more ambitious than those in the village church. The performers meet on that happy footing of *camaraderie* the fine arts create, the superior respect shown to Mrs. Vizard being mainly paid to her as the greater musician. They attack anthems and services; and a trio, by the parson, the blacksmith, and "Our Dame," is really an extraordinary treat, owing to the great beauty of the voices. It is also piquant to hear the female singer constantly six, and often ten, notes below the male counter-tenor; but then comes Wilder with his diapason, and the harmony is noble; the more so that Mrs. Vizard rehearses her pupils in the swell—a figure too little practised in music, and nowhere carried out as she does it.

One night the organist of Barford was there. They sang Kent's service in F, and Mrs. Vizard still admired it. She and the parson swelled in the duet—"To be a light to lighten the Gentiles," &c. Organist approved the execution, but said the composition was a meagre thing, quite out of date. "We have much finer things now by learned men of the day."

"Ah," said she, "bring me one."

So, next Sunday, he brought her a learned composition, and played it to her, preliminary to their singing it. But she declined it on the spot. "What!" said she. "Mr. X., would you compare this meaningless stuff with Kent in F? Why, in Kent the dominant sentiment of each composition is admirably preserved. His 'Magnificat' is lofty jubilation, with a free onward rush. His 'Dimittis' is divine repose after life's fever. But this poor pedant's 'Magnificat' begins with a mere crash, and then falls into the pathetic —an excellent thing in its place, but not in a song of triumph. As to his 'Dimittis,' it simply defies the words. This is no Christian sunset. It is not good old Simeon gently declining to his rest, content to close those eyes which had seen the world's salvation. This is a tempest,

and all the windows rattling, and the great Napoleon dying, amidst the fury of the elements, with 'tête d'armée!' on his dying lips, and 'battle' in his expiring soul. No, sir; if the learned Englishmen of this day can do nothing nearer the mark than DOLEFUL MAGNIFICATS and STORMY NUNC DIMITTISES, I shall stand faithful to poor dead Kent, and his fellows—they were my solace in sickness and sore trouble."

In accordance with these views of vocal music, and desirous to expand its sphere, Mrs. Vizard has just offered handsome prizes in the county for the best service, in which the dominant sentiments of the words shall be as well preserved as in Kent's despised service; and another prize to whoever can set any famous short secular poem, or poetical passage (not in ballad metre), to good and appropriate music.

This has elicited several pieces. The composers have tried their hands on Dryden's Ode; on the meeting of Hector and Andromache (Pope's 'Homer'); on two short poems of Tennyson; &c., &c.

But it is only the beginning of a good thing. The pieces are under consideration. But Vizard says the competitors are triflers. *He* shall set Mr. Arnold's version of "Hero and Leander" to the harp, and sing it himself. This, he intimates, will silence competition, and prove an era. I think so too, if his music should *happen* to equal the lines in value. But I hardly think it will, because the said Vizard, though he has taste and ear, does not know one note from another. So I hope "Hero and Leander" will fall into abler hands; and, in any case, I trust Mrs. Vizard will succeed in her worthy desire to enlarge, very greatly, the sphere and the nobility of vocal music. It is a desire worthy of this remarkable character, of whom I now take my leave with regret.

I must own that regret is caused in part by my fear that I may not have done her all the justice I desired.

I have long felt and regretted that many able female writers are doing much to perpetuate the petty vices of a sex, which, after all, is at present but half educated, by devoting three thick volumes to such empty women as Biography, though a lower art than Fiction, would not waste three pages on. They plead truth and fidelity to nature. "We write the average woman, for the average woman to read," say they. But they are not consistent; for the average woman is under five feet, and rather ugly. Now

these paltry women are all beautiful—καλαι τε μεγαλαι τε, as Homer hath it.

Fiction has just as much right to select large female souls as Biography or Painting has; and to pick out a selfish, shallow, illiterate creature, with nothing but beauty, and bestow three enormous volumes on her, is to make a perverse selection, beauty being, after all, rarer in women than wit, sense, and goodness. It is as false and ignoble in art, as to marry a pretty face without heart and brains is silly in conduct.

Besides, it gives the female *reader* a low model instead of a high one, and so does her a little harm; whereas a writer ought to do good—or try, at all events.

Having all this in my mind, and remembering how many noble women have shone like stars in every age and every land, and feeling sure that, as civilisation advances, such women will become far more common, I have tried to look ahead and paint La Klosking.

But such portraiture is difficult. It is writing a statue.

> "Qui mihi non credit faciat licet ipse periclum,
> Mox fuerit studiis æquior ille meis."

Harrington Vizard, Esq., caught Miss Fanny Dover on the top round but one of the steps in his library. She looked down, pinkish, and said she was searching for "Tillotson's Sermons."

"What on earth can you want of them?"

"To improve my mind, to be sure," said the minx.

Vizard said, "Now you stay there, miss — don't you move;" and he sent for Ina. She came directly, and he said, "Things have come to a climax. My lady is hunting for 'Tillotson's Sermons.' Poor Denison!" (that was the rosy curate's name).

"Well," said Fanny, turning red, "I told you I *should*. Why should I be good any longer? All the sick are cured one way or other, and I am myself again."

"Humph!" said Vizard. "Unfortunately for your little plans of conduct, the heads of this establishment here present have sat in secret committee, and your wings are to be clipped—by order of Council."

"La!" said Fanny pertly.

Vizard imposed silence with a lordly wave. "It is a laughable thing; but this divine is in earnest. He has revealed his hopes and fears to me."

"Then he is a great baby," said Fanny, coming down the steps. "No, no; we are both too poor." And she vented a little sigh.

"Not you. The vicar has written to vacate. Now I don't like you much, because you never make me laugh: but I'm awfully fond of Denison; and if you will marry my dear Denison, you shall have the vicarage—it is a fat one."

"Oh, cousin!"

"And," said Mrs. Vizard, "he permits me to furnish it for you. You and I will make it 'a bijou.'"

Fanny kissed them both impetuously, then said she would have a little cry. No sooner said than done. In due course she was Mrs. Denison, and broke a solemn vow that she never would teach girls St. Matthew.

Like coquettes in general, who have had their fling at the proper time, she makes a pretty good wife; but she has one fault—she is too hard upon girls who flirt.

Mr. Ashmead flourishes. Besides his agency, he sometimes treats for a new piece, collects a little company, and tours the provincial theatres. He always plays them a week at Taddington, and with perfect gravity loses six pounds per night. Then he has a "Bespeak," Vizard or Uxmoor turn about. There is a line of carriages; the snobs crowd in to see the gentry. Vizard pays £20 for his box, and takes £20 worth of tickets, and Joseph is in his glory, and stays behind the company to go to Islip Church next day, and spend a happy night at the Court. After that he says he feels *good* for three or four days.

Mrs. Gale now leases the Hillstock farm off Vizard, and does pretty well. She breeds a great many sheep and cattle. The high ground and sheltering woods suit them. She makes a little money every year, and gets a very good house for nothing.

Doctress Gale is still all eyes, and notices everything. She studies hard and practises a little. They tried to keep her out of the Taddington infirmary; but she went almost crying to Vizard, and he exploded with wrath. He consulted Lord Uxmoor, and between them the infirmary was threatened with the withdrawal of eighty annual subscriptions if they persisted. The managers caved in directly, and Doctress Gale is a steady visitor.

A few mothers are coming to their senses, and sending for her to their unmarried daughters. This is the main source of her professional income. She has, however, taken

one enormous fee from a *bon vivant,* whose life she saved by esculents. She told him at once he was beyond the reach of medicine, and she could do nothing for him unless he chose to live in her house, and eat and drink only what she should give him. He had a horror of dying, though he had lived so well; so he submitted, and she did actually cure that one glutton. But she says she will never do it again. "After forty years of made dishes they ought to be content to die; it is bare justice," quoth Rhoda Gale, M.D.

An apothecary in Barford threatened to indict this Gallic physician. But the other medical men dissuaded him, partly from liberality, partly from discretion; the fine would have been paid by public subscription twenty times over, and nothing gained but obloquy. The doctress would never have yielded.

She visits, and prescribes, and laughs at the law, as love is said to laugh at locksmiths.

To be sure, in this country, a law is no law, when it has no foundation in justice, morality, or public policy.

Happy in her position, and in her friends, she now reviews past events with the candour of a mind that loves truth sincerely. She went into Vizard's study one day, folded her arms, and delivered herself as follows: "I guess there's something I ought to say to *you.* When I told you about our treatment at Edinburgh, the wound still bled, and I did not measure my words as I ought, professing science. Now I feel a call to say that the Edinburgh school was, after all, more liberal to us than any other in Great Britain or Ireland. The others closed the door in our faces. This school opened it half. At first there was a liberal spirit; but the friends of justice got frightened, and the unionists stronger. We were overpowered at every turn. But what I omitted to impress on you is, that when we were defeated, it was always by very small majorities. That was so even with the opinions of the judges, which have been delivered since I told you my tale. There were six jurists, and only seven pettifoggers. It was so all through. Now, for practical purposes, the act of a majority is the act of a body. It must be so; it is the way of the world; but when an accurate person comes to describe a business, and deal with the character of a whole university, she is not to call the larger half the whole, and make the matter worse than it was. That is not scientific. Science *dis*criminates."

I am not sorry the doctress offered this little explanation; it accords with her sober mind and her veneration of truth.

But I could have dispensed with it for one. In Britain, when we are hurt, we howl; and the deuce is in it if the weak may not howl when the strong overpower them by the arts of the weak.

Should that part of my tale rouse any honest sympathy with this Englishwoman who can legally prescribe, consult, and take fees, in France, but not in England, though she could eclipse at a public examination nine-tenths of those who can, it may be as well to inform them that, even while her narrative was in the press, our Government declared it would do something for the relief of medical women, but would sleep upon it.

This is, on the whole, encouraging. But still, where there is no stimulus of faction or personal interest to urge a measure, but only such "unconsidered trifles" as public justice and public policy, there are always two great dangers: (1) that the sleep may know no waking; (2) that after too long a sleep the British legislator may jump out of bed, all in a hurry, and do the work ineffectually—for nothing leads oftener to reckless haste than long delay.

I hope, then, that a few of my influential readers will be vigilant, and challenge a full discussion by the whole mind of Parliament, so that no temporary, pettifogging, half-measure may slip into a thin house—like a weasel into an empty barn—and so obstruct for many years legislation upon durable principle. The thing lies in a nutshell. The Legislature has been entrapped. It never intended to outlaw women in the matter. The persons who have outlawed them are all subjects, and the engines of outlawry have been "certificates of attendance on lectures," and "public examinations." By closing the lecture-room and the examination-hall to all women—learned or unlearned—a clique has outlawed a population, under the letter, not the spirit, of a badly-written statute. But it is for the three estates of the British realm to leave off scribbling statutes, and learn to write them, and to bridle the egotism of cliques, and respect the nation. The present form of government exists on that understanding, and so must all forms of government in England. And it is so easy. It only wants a little singleness of mind and common-sense. Years ago certificates of attendance on various lectures were reasonably demanded. They were a slight presumptive evidence of proficiency, and had a supplementary value, because the public examinations were so loose and inadequate; but once establish a stiff, searching,

sufficient, incorruptible, public examination, and then to have passed that examination is not presumptive but demonstrative proof of proficiency, and swallows up all minor and merely presumptive proofs.

There is nothing much stupider than Anachronism. What avails certificates of lectures in our day? either the *knowledge* obtained at the lectures enables the pupil to pass the great examination or it does not. If it does, the certificate is superfluous; if it does not, the certificate is illusory.

What the British legislator, if for once he would rise to be a lawgiver, should do, and that quickly, is to throw open the medical schools to all *persons* for matriculation. To throw open all hospitals and infirmaries to matriculated students, without respect of sex, as they are already open, by shameless partiality and transparent greed, to unmatriculated women, provided they confine their ambition to the most repulsive and unfeminine part of Medicine, the nursing of both sexes and laying out of corpses.

Both the above rights, as independent of sex as other natural rights, should be expressly protected by "mandamus," and "suit for damages." The lecturers to be compelled to lecture to mixed classes, or to give separate lectures to matriculated women for half fees, whichever those lecturers prefer. Before this clause all difficulties would melt, like hail in the dog-days. Male modesty is a purely imaginary article set up for a trade purpose, and will give way to justice the moment it costs the proprietors fifty per cent. I know my own sex from hair to heel, and will take my Bible oath of *that*.

Of the foreign matriculated student, British or European, nothing should be demanded but the one thing which matters one straw—viz., infallible proofs of proficiency in anatomy, surgery, medicine, and its collaterals, under public examination. This, which is the only real safeguard, and the only necessary safeguard to the *public*, and the only one *the public* asks, should be placed, in some degree, under *the sure control of Government* without respect of cities; and much greater vigilance exercised than ever has been yet. Why, under the system which excludes learned women, male dunces have been personated by able students, and so diplomas stolen again and again. The student, male or female, should have power to compel the examiners, by mandamus and other stringent remedies, to examine at fit times and seasons. In all the *paperwork* of these examinations, the name, and of course the sex, of the student should

be concealed from the examiners. There is a very simple way of doing it.

Should a law be passed on this broad and simple basis, that law will stand immortal, with pettifogging acts falling all around, according to the custom of the country. The larger half of the population will no longer be unconstitutionally juggled, under cover of law, out of their right to take their secret ailments to a skilled physician of their own sex, and compelled to go, blushing, writhing, and, after all, concealing and fibbing, to a male physician; the picked few no longer robbed of their right to science, reputation, and Bread.

The good effect on the whole mind of women would be incalculable. Great prizes of study and genius offered to the able few have always a salutary and wonderful operation on the many who never gain them. It would be great and glad tidings to our whole female youth to say, "You *need* not be frivolous idlers; you *need* not give the colts fifty yards start for the Derby—I mean, you need not waste three hours of the short working day in dressing and undressing, and combing your hair. You need not throw away the very seed-time of life on music, though you are unmusical to the back-bone; nor yet on your three 'C's'—croquet, crochet, and coquetry; for Civilisation and sound Law have opened to you one great, noble, and difficult profession with three branches, two of which Nature intended you for. The path is arduous, but flowers grow beside it, and the prize is great."

I say that this prize, and frequent intercourse with those superior women who have won it, would leaven the whole sex with higher views of life than enter their heads at present; would raise their self-respect, and set thousands of them to study the great and noble things that are in Medicine, and connected with it, instead of childish things.

Is there really one manly heart that would grudge this boon to a sex which is the nurse and benefactress of every man in his tender and most precarious years?

Realise the hard condition of women. Amongst barbarians their lot is unmixed misery; with us their condition is better, but not what it ought to be, because we are but half civilised, and so their lot is still very unhappy compared with ours.

And we are so unreasonable. We men cannot go straight ten yards without *rewards* as well as punishments. Yet we could govern our women by punishments alone. They are eternally tempted to folly, yet snubbed the moment they would be wise. A million shops spread their nets, and entice

them by their direst foible. Their very mothers—for want of medical knowledge in the sex—clasp the fatal, idiotic corset on their growing bodies, though thin as a lath. So the girl grows up, crippled in the ribs and lungs by her own mother; and her life, too, is in stays—cabined, cribbed, confined; unless she can paint, or act, or write novels, every path of honourable ambition is closed to her. We treat her as we do our private soldiers—the lash, but no promotion; and our private soldiers are the scum of Europe for that very reason, and no other.

I say that to open the study and practice of Medicine to women-folk, under the infallible safeguard of a stiff public examination, will be to rise in respect for human rights to the level of European nations, who do not brag about just freedom half as loud as we do; and to respect the constitutional rights of many million citizens, who all pay the taxes like men, and by the contract with the State implied in that payment, by the clear human right they have yet to go down on their knees for. But it will also import into medical science a new and less theoretical, but cautious, teachable, observant kind of intellect; it will give the larger half of the nation an honourable ambition, and an honourable pursuit, towards which their hearts and instincts are bent by Nature herself; it will tend to elevate this whole sex, and its young children, male as well as female, and so will advance the civilisation of the world, which, in ages past, in our own day, and in all time, hath, and doth, and will keep step exactly with the progress of women towards mental equality with men.

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